



reports to 3rd week council hilary 2004

Helena Puig-Larrauri

President

Rent

Rent negotiations are now under way in a number of colleges. I've been dealing with a number of requests for help from individual common rooms on negotiations in their colleges. There was another rent meeting on Monday, which was helpful in sharing information and tactics. I would encourage as many people as possible to attend these meetings, which will probably be held every other week. As yet, no-one has applied for the cochair position (advertised on the web for months) – please get in touch if you are at all interested. In the mean time, Chris Allan and I have been collecting rent statistics and information for common rooms and posting it on the web. I've taken the rent negotiation pack off the web on request from a number of JCR presidents because apparently bursars were downloading it and throwing things from it back at them (!). We began to talk at the last meeting about the need for some kind of cross-campus strategy on rent increases. There is no way to have a cross campus strategy if only half the common rooms turn up to discuss it. Please make an effort to attend these meetings, or at least to let me know what is going on in your colleges (even if it is that there are no drastic increases) for the sake of information sharing.

College Inequality

The first meeting of this committee was last week, and was very productive. We decided that there are essentially three courses of action to pursue. In the first place, some of the specific recommendations of last year's report still have to be taken forward through University committees. Secondly, the report does not need to be re-written, but some of the figures in it need to be updated. Also, we should collect more information on hardship funds provision as this is an issue the University will soon be legally obliged to look at in particular, and we should aim to capitalise on that. Thirdly, common rooms will be approached about putting pressure on their Governing Bodies to address the issue of college inequality, whether it be by looking for reciprocal arrangements with other colleges or looking for a centralised solution. I have written to the Vice Chancellor with regards to the College Contribution Scheme as well.

F&F

Last week saw the Higher Education Bill passing through its second reading in Parliament. The Finance and Funding campaign has run over the past year a vigorous and diverse campaign. I am tired of hearing cynics, and in particular the student press, condemn any of the actions of the campaign. Take a look at what has actually been done. Direct action that has got the strength of our message through to both the University and the government because we simply will not give up. Lobbying of MPs in Parliament – many of them actually capitulated to the pressure of students. Letters and articles to national papers to ensure that the debate on HE funding did not die down. A massive letter writing campaign to MPs that amongst other things made Alan Johnson's server crash from the number of emails he received. It is, of course, difficult to measure the effect of our campaign, and even more so of any particular action, on the Higher Education debate. We are part of a national campaign on this issue, and it is not something on which we can see immediate or direct effects at Oxford University. We have responsibility to engage in this debate, to change things, to make our voice heard. To say that we have not done that is laughable. This Bill has seen the biggest rebellion in this government. It passed only by five votes. It still has to go through a third reading and could very well be defeated. Don't give up on it now. On that note – plans for F&F. The emergency motion about the referendum spells out one of the things that we would like to do. If you would like to play a part in shaping the direction of the campaign over the next few months, we meet every Tuesday at 5pm in the OUSU offices. We are also looking for a cochair – email me if you would like to apply.

Representation

I have been doing a review of the committees on which there is meant to be student representation in the University. It turns out there is a discrepancy between the University's records and the student union's – very dull, but hopefully will be sorted out soon. I am also pursuing the issue of student representation on Conference of Colleges and will report back later.

OUSU information

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Website

I have now updated many of the factual inaccuracies on ousu.org. If anyone finds more, please drop me an email at president@ousu.org

Rodrigo Davies

V-P (Finance)

OUSU is working. The last couple of weeks have been particularly satisfying from an internal administration point of view since new ideas for involving people and making more concrete the foundations we have are coming to the fore.

I advertised for people interested in becoming Business Manager and Freshers Fair Organisers in the 0th week Oxford Student and have had a great deal of interest. At the time of writing there is one week left for applicants to the Fair position, and Business Manager applications have now closed. I look forward to interviewing the candidates and hopefully selecting a strong team well ahead of time that can build on the experiences of the last couple of years and hopefully won't be as pressured by time as previous holders of the posts have been. I will also be appointing summer publications editors around the end of term so that the Oxford Handbook and Freshers Guide in particular can have very clear project plans and be delivered more smoothly. I would encourage anyone who has any sort of publication / writing experience to apply for those positions, which will be posted on the website at www.ousu.org/jobs fairly shortly. In the meantime I'd appreciate it if Common Room representatives could pass on anyone interested to me via email(finance@ousu.org)

The Shop and Oxford Student Services Limited, its managing company, remain in the process of redirection and reconstruction. I had hoped to have some more concrete plans by this stage but due to the processing of last year's accounts it is taking a little longer than expected. It looks unlikely that we will be able to continue supplying college shops with the regularity that we have done in the past, at least for the foreseeable future. Once the Trustees have met next week I intend to give a full report to Council. I do believe that there is great potential for OSSL to be used as the commercial arm of the Student Union, and in all honesty it is only wise for a Student Union that has so many commercial publications and ventures to run such interests through a company that has limited liability. This might seem like a rather daring move but it is in fact a formality that needs tidying up if OUSU is to take greater control over its finances.

Common Rooms were this week issued with a What Do You Get For Your Money brochure which has undergone a long overdue update. I hope this was reasonably well received – early indications suggest that it was. Further suggestions for inclusions, or queries about it are welcome. Democratic involvement is a wonderful thing that some people fear will loosen their grip on power. I hope it does. It is into this fold that I am hoping to bring E-Democracy to OUSU, using a model that has been successfully used in Durham for a number of years and now even runs their statutory annual elections. While the sceptics run for cover, I think the proposed referendum on fees would be an excellent time to test the system without risking our legal requirements under the Education Act. Chris Allan is currently looking at the code and back-end of the system, which appears to have been designed very rigidly and with some co-operation from the University could be transported across to fit the Student Union's needs.

It was quite pleasing to reap the benefits of cross-University communication in this instance, especially since the NUS has been such a remarkable let-down across the board. Ironically the organisation might actually be more effective if it were packed with extreme left-wingers as some people seem to believe is the case. The real problem within our National Union as far as I can see is that it is riddled with would-be stooges of a certain faction of a certain political party. Their connection with students is remarkably absent and in fact one need not even mention their astoundingly defective democratic structures given that their lack of consultation is blindly obvious from their persistent tendency not to make any sort of trouble for universities or the government. It's really not surprising that the NUS don't want to rock the boat at this time of fees being increased so markedly – their children are going to need the benefits of taxpayer-subsidised cafes, accommodation and offices that go with the New Labour Tsk, and people think I'm a Tory.

A brief word on democracy is probably appropriate here. It seems that some people seem to think that their own agenda on what is best for students is best voiced not by consulting or considering students' interests, but by pushing on ahead in the hope that students at large will fall in line and be overwhelmed by political activism. I think e-democracy and the question of whether to hold a referendum on fees hit at the heart of what the Student Union's attitude should be towards the students of this University. Students need to be made stakeholders in the process, asked actively

overwhelmed by political activism. I think e-democracy and the question of whether to hold a referendum on fees hit at the heart of what the Student Union's attitude should be towards the students of this University. Students need to be made stakeholders in the process, asked actively for their opinion and be made part of the decision-making process. The Student Union should not be afraid of radical ways of engaging with students that meet them at their level rather than at a political altar which we have constructed. Ultimately it always has been – and always will be – a minority of students who get very actively involved in the decision-making processes of the Student Union, but this does not mean that students don't have an opinion. It means that they don't have the time to devote to those processes, due in part to the fact that devotees of the decision-making processes tend to have very little grounding in the supposedly evil world of the non-political. Everything is political in one sense or another. With or without banners from 1968. Holding on to the political expressions of the past to the letter is to entirely miss their spirit. As I've said on so many occasions before, the labels of Left and Right have ceased to have any meaning in OUSU since they used by various factions as sticks to beat each other. The more damaging split comes from those who are obsessed with power and positions within the organisation and oppose change of any sort that they perceive threatens their small piece of the pie. Hanging this all on the banner of being Radical is frankly ironic. Anyone who has worked in the Student Union over the past couple of years will have seen that there is great potential not only for internal change but also in greatly increasing OUSU's democracy. I can't help but wonder what some people are so afraid of. The Wrong Result?

Rosie Buckland Opportunities)

V-P (Welfare & Equal

I have mostly been...co-ordinating a brilliantly successful equal opps campaign meeting in OUSU to try to encourage more people to get involved with the campaigns-loads of new faces turned up and it's been wonderful to see new people coming along to the subsequent DA, QR and Anti-Racism meetings. Anti-Racism held a discussion on race and admissions, DA are looking at the new mental health bill and its implications and QR held a speaker meeting on the gay liberation front. Just a reminder that anyone is welcome to simply turn up and that DA meets on Thursdays at 4.00 in OUSU, QR at 5.30 in the Northgate on Thursdays and Anti-Racism on Wednesdays at 5.00 in OUSU.

All three campaigns were involved with Holocaust Memorial Day as well, which was held last week and which had a really high turnout-thank you to all those who read or helped out in any other way. I also introduced some newer readings to this year's service, which seemed to work well. Display boards with information from the Holocaust Education Trust are still up in the foyer of Wadham chapel, but will be coming down shortly, so do have a look at them soon if you want to.

I've also been planning for diversity week, which is happening in FIFTH WEEK, going into 6TH WEEK. A plan of events will be going into EVERYONE'S pidge next week, so please stick it up on your noticeboard and turn up to events-don't just bin it. The campaigns have all been working very hard and I'm very pleased at having been able to produce enough cards to pidge everybody a plan-posters will be going up as well, but this should ensure that as many new people as possible get involved. I'm also in the process of writing to all the student societies and local community groups concerned with similar aims, as the week will hopefully see the start of some new community initiatives and volunteering opportunities. To help with this, there should be a pretty high community presence at all of the events and hopefully lasting links will be able to be made.

I've also had plenty of casework, which always has to be prioritised and takes up quite a fair bit of time, dealt with plenty of enquiries from common room officers and dealt out a very healthy number of condoms, ordered a small supply of lube, extra strong condoms, dental dams and non-latex condoms for every common room, met with the new Igbsoc president and members of the Pride group to try to get relations going between the oxford pride group, lgb soc, lgb reps, the Northgate and QR-working together always produces better results. I've also attended University Rules committee and sought clarification on various regulations to do with clubs and societies, attended the working party on the degree ceremony with Digo, and organised a regular police surgery with Thames Valley in OUSU-a drop-in session for students. I've also been invited to speak at the college doctor's association meeting on confidentiality concerns, so will hopefully be able to ensure that confidentiality will be tightened up where it needs to be and dealt with press enquiries ranging from altered radio and the occupation to the telegraph and gambling.

Oh yes, the occupation, I nearly forgot... I participated in a successful occupation of Exam Schools prior to the HE bill going through parliament and am not going to apologise for having done so. OUSU policy is clear and student's views are clear.

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Emphasis was continually placed on ensuring minimal disruption to students and all lecturers were contacted inviting them to take their lectures anyway. A top priority was also to ensure that students knew why we were there and I was so heartened by the number of students who joined us throughout the evening and the following day, as well as the positive feedback we received from students going past schools. A huge number of students were also on the march to Wellington Square and I am proud to have been a part of such a demonstration of student feeling. It is the university, whose refusal to listen to us was pretty clearly demonstrated at the very-locked university offices, and the government, who are really being obstructive and seem hell-bent on disrupting the education of future generations. The fight to be had is with them, not amongst ourselves. We are the students who deal with the very real failures of means-testing, who advise far too many students on debt problems, whose younger siblings might now not see HE as an option because it simply isn't worth the money. The occupation was a clear and powerful demonstration of these fears and arose from a shared and fundamental belief that education is a social good and not a commodity. Thank you to all those who were at or supported the occupation, especially my fellow sabs and exec. I welcome being held to account, I think it is healthy, but please don't think that I, or any other student member, participated in the occupation on a frivolous whim-if you want to see a real disregard for education just look at the HE bill.

Catherine Wallis

V-P (Women)

I've been doing some work with different groups of women who are setting up projects. Two women are creating a Breast Cancer fundraising committee and plan to hold their first event next week, a Valentine's Day pink-themed club night. If you would like to help out with this committee, please contact michelle.doran@exeter. I've also been talking to a woman who's organising events for International Women's Week and one who's founding a conference for women going into the world of work; if you would like any more information on these please contact me.

I've been taking lots of bookings (and cancellations) for the Nightbus. If you'd like to drive the Nightbus, we could really do with training up some more people – you need to be over 21 and have held a licence for at least 2 years; OUSU will pay for the assessment course and you'll also get paid for the driving you do. Please contact me for more details.

I am still in the thick of organising Finals Forums and desperately short of tutors who are free to take part – I need tutors for most subjects still so please please please rack your brains and tell me of anyone you think may be suitable as the Finals Fora are a really good scheme which helps many women across the University.

I've booked a venue for the Women's Open Day and have been designing publicity to send out to schools. Spread the word amongst any potential (female) applicants you know, particularly those who might need a bit of encouragement!

In obedience to the wishes of Women's Campaign I have been doing some of the groundwork for a campaign on safety in college accommodation, and hope to highlight the grounds we have for concern at the Reclaim the Night march (see below). More details of this are on the website under Women's Campaign.

For Diversity Week Women's Campaign are planning a Women's Cabaret to showcase female talent, which will raise money for a women's shelter and for eating disorders (as Eating Disorders Week is coming up we thought we'd combine the two) – if you'd like to get involved in volunteering for either organisation, please let me know - and a Reclaim the Night March to raise awareness of problems of security around Oxford, to which we will invite local women's organisations. For the March I've planned a route and written to the Chief Constable of the police to request this (we think it should be accepted) and made initial contact with some women outside the University who may be interested in attending. For the Cabaret I've had tremendous problems getting a venue sorted either for the night or for rehearsals, but I have some artistes lined up nevertheless - if your college has a suitable venue (with in-tune piano, disabled access, and where we're allowed to drink) please let me know.

I have been compiling a report into the University's use of sweatshops for the AUT, who may be willing to support our campaign. Ethics Committee have sent out the petitions we hope to present to the Vice-Chancellor to all colleges, so please do sign it and collect as many signatures as you can from all your acquaintance. We're currently writing the motion to be brought to JCC which will be the first step in taking the campaign to the University structures.

Promoting Choice has been a little quiet of late, but we hope to get involved and active. In preparation I have been looking through the current Unplanned Pregnancy: Your Options booklet (which I am mandated to write in conjunction with the committee) to gather ideas on what may need to be changed and whether it would be more suitable to keep the current format with some

preparation and consulting through the current programme regularly, your reports (which I am mandated to write in conjunction with the committee) to gather ideas on what may need to be changed and whether it would be more suitable to keep the current format with some minor changes or undertake a complete overhaul. I have also been consulting with the student parents I can contact to see what sort of event they would like me to organise for them (my job description specifies a 'student parent welcome'), so we'll see what comes of that.

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

“When you’ve got your back to the wall, you must turn round and fight.” - John Major

It’s been a pretty busy couple of weeks, so apologies for the length of this report. On Wednesday of 2nd week, I went along to a meeting with graduate common room presidents, which was extremely useful and will become a regular fortnightly event. I also set up an MCR President email list, making it easier to share ideas and consult graduate students. At the time of writing this, I have received quite a few enquiries from people who might be interested in being my successor, which given the chequered past of trying to find people willing to be VP (Graduates) is extremely welcome news.

Both the International Students and the Mature Students campaigns are going well, with events planned for this week, as well as for Diversity Week. We could always use more help with either of those campaigns - do let me know if you would be interested.

I went along on Wednesday morning to a meeting with the QAA team to discuss Oxford’s academic provision and OUSU’s submission. Many thanks to the student volunteers who went along to that - our participation in the QAA process is an important part of improving academic provision for students. Along with Louise, I went along to the Educational Policy and Standards Committee - we were amused to find ourselves seated next to the Proctors, but neither they nor any of the other members of the committee seemed any less receptive to what we had to say than usual.

I’ve also attended meetings of the College Inequality Committee and the Finance and Funding Campaign, to try to ensure that those committees hear and incorporate into their decision-making the needs and views of graduates students.

A couple of days ago, I went along to the NUS’ Postgraduate Advisory Group, which consists of a small group of graduate sabs who advise the NUS on what it should be concentrating on doing for graduate students. I’m writing this report before that meeting takes place, so will give an update at council. So there’s lots of good and important work, much of which goes on without much publicity, but is none the less important for all that. And I suppose I also ought to mention that last Monday and Tuesday I participated in the occupation of the Examination Schools. I would be more than happy to answer any questions about this, but thought I might just explain a bit about why I participated. I first applied to university in the year that the grant was finally abolished and tuition fees were introduced. I was involved in the campaign against tuition fees, over which we managed to force the government to change its policy, and I’ve been involved in the campaign against top-up fees. Last week was the culmination of that campaign, and we all knew it would be desperately close. Because I have the dubious pleasure of sitting on University Council, I also was aware that our nice, polite entreaties to the Vice Chancellor to be involved in the discussions about how to expand the bursary system should the bill pass were being met with, shall we say, less than complete assent. It wasn’t my idea, but when someone suggested an occupation of the Exam Schools at the F&F meeting, I whole-heartedly supported the idea. Both in terms of trying to show wavering MPs the strength of feeling of students about the bill, and in terms of trying to shift the university from its uncooperative attitude towards taking our views into consideration, it made a lot of sense.

The bill, of course, just about passed, but I am not going to apologise for having been involved in the occupation, and I’m proud that we can say that we tried absolutely everything to defeat top-up fees, in accordance with the abundantly clear policy that we have. As sabbatical officers, my colleagues and I care about students who had their lectures cancelled, that’s why Louise as our spokesperson negotiated with the Clerk to the Proctors to ensure that lectures on the Wednesday were not cancelled. If you’re looking for those who genuinely weren’t that bothered about disrupting students’ education, then you need look no further than the university authorities who refused to engage in any negotiations whatsoever to allow the lectures to go ahead, even when we offered to do whatever, short of leaving the building, was needed to meet health and safety requirements to allow lectures to go ahead. Had they been as interested as we were in avoiding disruption of lectures, then they would have taken up our offer to ensure that they had control of all the building bar the front hall, getting round the health and safety problem.

In an ideal world, there wouldn’t have had to be an occupation. In an ideal world, there wouldn’t be proposals for top-up fees. In an ideal world, the university would pay more attention to what

condition of all the buildings but the front hall, getting round the health and safety problem. In an ideal world, there wouldn't have had to be an occupation. In an ideal world, there wouldn't be proposals for top-up fees. In an ideal world, the university would pay more attention to what its students suggest. I stick by my judgement, though, that in the actual situation that we faced last Monday it was right to occupy the Exam Schools, and the success of the action can be seen by the hundreds of new people who got involved in the campaign for the first time. The whole distinction drawn in the motion of censure between those who were there after 9am and those who were not is a nonsense - some sabs and students went down to London for the final lobby and some stayed to keep the campaign going in Oxford. I have no problem with being held to account, though it would have been nice if the proposers of the motion could have got little things like the time when we're contracted to start work right, and I suppose it is a bit sad that rather than discussing how best to provide for students, the bulk of OUSU Council will get taken up with debating the conduct of some of the sab officers. Ultimately, however, all this comes down to a question of judgement. Sabs are elected to campaign and are elected to enact OUSU policy. More than that, we've dealt with enough cases of current students in complete despair over their level of debt to stand aside while people took action to try to prevent the situation from getting any worse. Whether or not you think we were misguided, those of us in the occupation really did believe that it was important, and we took that decision based on as much experience of campaigning and of direct action as anyone at OUSU Council. I've actually faced a censure motion once before in OUSU Council, after a piece of direct action outside the Exam Schools in support of OUSU's no platform for fascists policy. In the short term, that piece of direct action didn't prevent the speaker from being able to speak at the meeting, but the censure motion failed and the direct action helped make sure that we've never had a fascist come and speak in Oxford since. If this piece of direct action achieves half as much in terms of its aims, I'll be well pleased, censure or no censure. I'd also like to thank all the other sabs (whether up for censure or not) for being brilliant, and all the students who participated in the occupation or sent messages of support. Right. Rant over - any questions?

Louise McMullan

V-P (Access & Academic Affairs)

Academic affairs: Wednesday's acaff meeting went well – thanks to the Junior Proctor for coming along. The next event on the acaff termcard is a revision skills session, open to all on Wednesday of 5th week at 5pm. The library postcards should be ready by 6th week so look out for them in your pigeon holes. If you'd like to help with the library campaign email steven.harper@ccc.ox.ac.uk. I have met with the new director of the IAUL (Institute for the Advancement of University Learning) and he is very interested in producing a study skills guide.

I think that OUSU should be central to this. It is probably something that acaff committee will focus more on next term but this term I would really appreciate hearing from CR presidents and acaff officers about study skills and induction provision in their colleges. Any surveys you have on this would be very useful. Ideally I would like to have a report on this done by the end of term and then to proceed next term with a guide on best practice. EPSC last Friday – a paper went through to reform the JCC system. Its main recommendations were: to encourage better links between JCC reps and their faculties, to work towards standardising the way that JCC reps are elected and to help co-ordination between JCCs and OUSU. All good stuff. Many thanks again to all those JCC reps who came along to the JCC forum last term and shared their views, they were considered very strongly in the paper. Casework continues to demand quite a lot of time and attention.

Target schools: All seems to be well here. There's a lot of very dull admin to be getting on with at the moment – paperwork for our forthcoming mailing and publicity have been the main things I've been getting on with. The co-chairs have been great at getting on with their own projects and many of the arrangements are now in place. We do, however, need lots of volunteers, especially from Jesus, Lincoln, Exeter and students from Northern Ireland and Sheffield. For Northern Ireland and Sheffield Target schools needs people to come along to conferences and schools visits – this will be great fun so if you'd like to volunteer email access@ousu.org. Alternative Prospectus:

The cause of many a sleepless night. I have now sent begging letters to the Oxford Society and to the Registrar asking for their help. In the mean time I am going ahead with sending it out to every state school in the country with the Target schools mailing. The remaining copies may have to be sold if we cannot receive extra funding from the University or alumni. This is really very sad but everyone has tried their best to fill this gap in the budget.

And on this business of occupying buildings. Well, I've seen the VP Grad's report and I have to say I completely agree with him. Dan has laid out perfectly many of my intuitions and feelings about the events of last week. I make no apologies for my part in the occupation of the exam schools. It isn't the first time I've been involved in something like this and I very much doubt it will be the last.

I completely agree with him. Dan has laid out perfectly many of my intentions and feelings about the events of last week. I make no apologies for my part in the occupation of the exam schools. It isn't the first time I've been involved in something like this and I very much doubt it will be the last. Just for the record, I did not, at the 3pm meeting last week, vote in favour of occupying for my own reasons, however I felt bound to play my part and I'm glad that I did. I freely admit that I fully support direct action when it is required, my father is a trade unionist and that's what I've been taught – again I make no apologies for this. I do not think that I have compromised my integrity as a sabbatical officer of the student union – I ran in an election for this job because I knew that I would put my head on the line when it was needed and when I knew that others would not and that's what I've done since day one. Thanks to the sabs, exec and students who've shown their support during the week.

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

The two weeks have gone very quickly and on the RAG side we've managed to make loads of money to get the term off to a good start. As well as the money that is coming in from Mr and Miss Oxford events and pants – for which we have had hundreds of orders – including 176 (over £1000's worth) from Oriel JCR we have also raised centrally £680 for The Children's Trust and £750 for Anthony Nolan. RAG formal hall is continuing every Monday.

Coming up very soon is RAG Blind Date (Tues 10th Feb) and the Every College Bar Crawl (Fri 6th Feb). If anyone wants to be involved please let me know.

Manchester RAG also coming down for a fundraiser at the weekend.

On the community side bookings have been taken for the Volunteering Fair on Feb 21st and the Oxford Students Fairtrade Coalition has been active in helping with the Fairtrade Debate Thurs 5th Feb in the Union.