

OUSU

reports to council

3rd week hilary 2007

Alan Strickland

President

Common Rooms

Meetings

- I spoke at Keble JCR to give a summary of what OUSU does and answer questions, and also at Christ Church GCR (graduate common room) with the Vice-President (Graduates).
- Had the pleasure of being the after-dinner speaker at Merton College's Welfare Dinner. Making welfare funny (in the nicest possible way) is a tricky task!
- Attended Presidents' Committee.

Rent

- Chaired a rent information meeting attended by presidents and treasurers.
- Supported the Rent & Accommodation Officer in chairing the first meeting of OUSU Rent Committee. The committee is working on
- Van Noorden index: Have arranged a meeting with the Lincoln bursar who is responsible for calculating the Van Noorden index, to discuss how the index can be made more transparent. Our aim is to engage an independent economist to analyse the calculation, both for its technical merit and to assess its fairness as an indicator of increased college costs.
- The role of the City Council in accommodation. The City Council has a target for the number of its students the University and its Colleges should accommodate. If increasing rents are encouraging students to use the private housing market, this could be a useful angle. I've now got some information from the Council and will create a short briefing paper which will be circulated asap.
- Rent statistics – the committee is collating rent statistics. If you haven't yet submitted yours, please e-mail Juliette, our Rent & Accommodation Officer.

Post-graduate Assembly

- Attended PGA earlier this week - the best attended PGA ever, thanks to Andrea for organising this. I look forward to helping Andrea support PGA and push forward with graduate issues.

University

SRI

- Attended the University SRI Working Party meeting last Monday. The working party is small, focused and progressing well. We are currently working on a draft of the proposed SRI policy for the University.

JRAM meeting

- I organised a meeting with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning & Resources) for common room presidents and OUSU reps.
- Several important issues were raised, but because the model is relatively complex, the meeting ended without much clarity on exactly what the potent implications of the change will be.
- The JRAM team will send more information, which I'll forward when I receive it.

Permanent Private Hall Review

- With the Vice-President (Access & Academic Affairs) I met with the PPH Review panel at Rhodes House. The panel is chaired by Sir Colin Lucas, the previous vice-chancellor and is looking at all aspects of PPHs, with a view to making recommendations to the University.

General

- Staffed the welcome desk at the Alternative Careers Fair for a couple of hours last weekend. Well done to Imran for a great event.

Other Unions

- Met with the President of King's College London Students' Union to discuss their recent governance reform and hear how it has worked in practice.

Ed Mayne

V-P (Finance)

I don't have a great deal to report this week other than my ordinary duties. These primarily consist of: gathering in adverts for *The Oxford Student* and converting them into the correct format; my weekly meetings of the Publications Board of *The Oxford Student*; working at Park End on Wednesday nights on the door (and delivering tickets to CR reps beforehand); running errands for OUSU – from pigging Eye Cards to delivering *The Oxford Student*.

Other than this I have helped Imran in his publication of the *Alternative Careers Fair* guide. I'd like to congratulate him on the incredibly smooth running of the Alternative Careers Fair on Saturday. I have also begun to help Jenny lay the finishing touches to the final *Women's Handbook*.

One of the main projects of the last fortnight has been to lay plans for new websites for the *Oxford and Cambridge Careers Handbook* and *The Oxford Student*. I regret to say that these new plans have yet to be finalised but I will report back with more information on this soon.

I have met with my successor and the President-Elect to discuss their ideas for staffing changes to be made next year. Hopefully a motion will soon come to Council outlining these proposals.

I'd like to reassure Council the transition to the SAGE accounting system is nearing its final phase. The Accounts staff have been meeting with University representatives on a more than twice weekly basis.

My main priority for the next fortnight is to carry out the final stages of the appointment of the Business Manager, the term of whom begins in June 2007. Interviews will hopefully be held in 4th Week for this position.

I wish the Business Manager the very best of luck with the re-launch of our club night Lush at Oceans and Collins, to be held every other Tuesday, under the new leadership delegated to Farhan Ahmed. I hope to report good news about this to Council in the near future.

Jamie Frew Opportunities)

V-P (Welfare and Equal

Casework and Student Advice Service

As mentioned in my previous report to OUSU Council I am becoming increasingly worried about the time, skills and support necessary for the members of the SAS to provide the services that they offer and the ramifications that their work in this capacity has upon both themselves and OUSU as a whole. Since the last meeting of Council I would estimate that I had performed at least

25 hours (only 10 hours short of a full working week) of casework both alone and jointly with other members of the SAS. Further to this (as reported in their reports) other members of the SAS have similarly had high casework loads. I would like to stress that these past two weeks have seen an unusually high number of cases that required particularly extensive and urgent casework. It must, however, be said that in a normal week I do not find it uncommon to be faced with 15 hours of casework a load which makes it extremely difficult to complete even a satisfactory portion of my other constitutional duties.

Further to simple matters of time both the other members of the SAS and myself have shared concerns over any sabbatical officers abilities to cope with casework both in terms of required skills and emotional support under the current structure of the SAS. As such I and the other members of the team have begun work on revising the structures and processes under which the SAS operate. I will be making every attempt to ensure that the service that is provided to students in need changes as little as possible and is improve where feasible. However, it must be noted that in order to reform the service into a system that is efficient, effective and prudent greater demands may need to be placed upon the time of what is an already often-overstretched team. In the light of this I have been giving serious thought to the two obvious options for resolving this difficulty; finding some way to reduce the non-casework workloads of the sabbatical officers who comprise the SAS or else finding some way to provide for OUSU to rehire a Student Advisor (as had been policy in 2004/5).

Rustication

One of my major areas of interest during my time in office has been the treatment and rights allowed to students who have willingly chosen to suspend their status as students for personal reasons. It is sadly often the case that colleges remove from students many basic facilities that would enable them to remain better connected to their college community, aid them with interim academic work and speed their recovery and return to college life. Indeed, in many cases it would seem that colleges have chosen to treat students as though they had been punished by rustication as opposed to taken action for their own benefit.

To this end I have been assisting David Semple (Executive Officer for Graduate Welfare) in the formulation of a set of basic rights that we believe should be guaranteed to all students who suspend their status for welfare reasons. A motion that supports these rights has already been brought to and passed through Postgraduate Assembly and further work has been undertaken by members of that body in order to further develop this proposal.

Survival Guide

Given the crises in the area of casework that have occurred over the past two weeks it would be unrealistic for me to expect for there to have been any great leaps forward in the production of the Survival Guide. This would be the case except for the efforts of David Semple (Executive Officer for Graduate Welfare) whose work on the Survival Guide has brought the guide to the brink of conclusion by single-handedly performing the final data check. I am now part way through the final adjustments to layout and typesetting and see little reason why the guide should not be ready for publishing before the next meeting of Council.

Though it has often been a struggle and has caused more problems and taken longer than I could ever have thought possible I am relieved and excited to be so close to finishing this guide. I believe that the time that it has thus far taken to get the guide into it's current state was regrettable, but utterly necessary and that we will soon be distributing a handbook that I will and OUSU should be justly proud and that will help people for years to come.

Queer Rights

With each week that passes Queer Rights campaign is becoming more vibrant, far-reaching and exciting in which to play a part. Working with past members of OUSU in Stonewall the group is developing plans for an outreach and support program for local school children – progress is slow due to obvious legal and bureaucratic obstacles that surround any such project, but the potential is already obvious. In addition to which we are moving into the NUS campaign to allow gay and bisexual men to give blood and to encourage other people to give blood to help prevent a shortfall increased by this inability.

Health and Welfare

There has been a short quiet period in terms of meetings for Health and Welfare committee after a very active 1st week. This has been the result of a delay in the conduct of research into the current state of the Barnes Unit which was severely curtailed by recent cut backs in mental health care provision both within Oxfordshire and nationally. On the basis of this information (which is due to be analysed in OUSU next week) it may (and probably will) prove sensible to reinvigorate the extensive campaign that OUSU ran last year to prevent the closure of a unit that provided support to hundreds of students in dire need.

Jenny Hoogewerf-McComb	V-P (Women)
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Since last time I've been:

Finishing the Women's Handbook- the content is now entirely complete, and it is 97% laid. Whew! It should be printed over the next couple of weeks, and then there will be distribution and a launch dinner. I'm hoping to print some run-on copies so that we can hand those out at Fresher's Fair next year, making things more efficient, and I am also going to print out a lot of the new welfare information I have written into separate "mini-guides" on issues such as domestic violence for college women's officers to lend to their casework. I've prepared a childcare and student parent support survey to be sent to all Domestic Bursars so we can analyse what sort of care is available both in individual colleges and on a University scale- then we'll start lobbying to fill in the gaps. I've been wonderfully grateful for my two new co-chairs of WomCam, Kit and Lucy, who are doing great things in bringing in new members and sparking ideas for events. At the moment, we're planning a "Viva La Vulva" event for the 15th of Feb- the day after V-day, with readings from the Vagina Monologues, art, discussion and refreshments. We're also planning a Women's History session for International Women's Day in March. I'm starting to get arrangements going for the Women's Open Day, 1st March, but I still need volunteers so if anyone can assist me with that I would be very grateful indeed! We've also been consulting on the Abortion Rights march which will be held towards the end of term in London- WomCam hopes to send a delegation of demonstrators down to agitate for a woman's right to choose for herself. The "Enough" eating disorder support group first session was really productive, and I hope to be able to continue this in the months to come. I was also very pleased to lend my support to and see PGA pass a motion calling for a Graduate Women's Exec Officer- I think more graduate representation on the OUSU executive would be a great thing, and I am sure my successor Hannah could do with ideas and advice surrounding issues like childcare and harassment as they relate to graduate women. I was privileged to be invited to debate whether Amnesty International should have pro choice policy by the Oxford Amnesty Group, which was two hours of very interesting discussion indeed, and the links I made with the society will hopefully develop into some exciting collaborations in future; we're already talking about holding events with a joint focus on domestic violence and abuse of women worldwide. My "official" duties this term have involved preparing three papers for University committees: on a centrally-funded Safety Bus, on a new committee of college Fellows for Women, and on the talks on safety and harassment which should be in place for all freshers coming up next Michaelmas.

I'd like to say a big thank you to the rest of the sabbatical team and exec for all of their hard work. OUSU can be a stressful organisation at times- the sheer diversity of the things we achieve is very hard to manage. Yet, when we get it right, we can provide a service for students which nobody else in the University or outside c

Andrea Miller

V-P (Graduates)

- I. Committee Meetings: I've been to lots of committee meetings since the last meeting of OUSU Council!
 - A. Curators of the University Libraries
 - i. Plans for the RI library site were discussed and it was made clear that specific graduate workspace is a permanent element of the plan. I am now a member of the RI Site Consultative Committee, so I will ensure that it happens and that students are consulted about what sort of space and facilities they want.
 - B. Educational Policy Standards Committee, Graduate Panel
 - i. Discussion of progress of online graduate admissions process. The pilot in the law faculty has gone extremely well.
 - ii. Discussion of the online supervisor/student reporting pilot, which experienced a bit more difficulty.
 - iii. Discussion of 'Embedding Graduate Studies,' which I promised to send directly out to all graduates for consultation
 - iv. Discussion of how to improve codes of supervision in departments and divisions
 - C. Meeting with Project Isidore Communications Director: Tara Jewell came to speak with us (myself and VP Access and Academic Affairs, Helen Bagshaw) about the new online registration system and online graduate applications processes. They were most interested in knowing how to best get the news out to students.
 - D. Educational Policy Standards Committee
 - i. Discussion of the possible introduction of electronic plagiarism detection software, 'TurnItIn.'
 - ii. Discussion of forming a new working party to look at the use of teaching and learning space across the university
- II. Business with the MCRs:
 - A. On Thursday, 25th January, I attended a meeting of the Christ Church GCR along with Alan, where they were discussing whether or not to reaffiliate to OUSU. Not enough people attended the meeting to vote right there and then, so a referendum was planned, and results are not yet known.
 - B. Only 2 common rooms have really filled out the survey and I am rather upset about it.
- III. The Hilary Term meeting of PGA is scheduled for 4.30pm at the University Club on Tuesday, January 30th. More on that next time.
- IV. I've spent lots of the past week dealing with SAS casework.
- V. I have continued to work with Alan and others to research the implications of the impending Charities Act.

Helen Bagshaw

V-P (Access & Academic Affairs)

Brief and to the point I hope:

Curators of University Libraries

This meeting was held on Monday of 2nd Week, and we attended a presentation of the business case for the RI Humanities Library beforehand. Andrea and I have been invited to represent student views on the Consultative Groups for both the RI Site and the redevelopment of the New Bodleian; members of the University are finally getting the message that they need to consult with students, which we are very pleased about. Post-meeting we attended a *vin d'honneur* for the Bodley's Librarian and Director of OULS; the new postholder will be attending the next meeting of Curators so more on that at a later date.

ISIDORE Meeting

Andrea and I were contacted by the Communications Officers for the ISIDORE Project and Student Administration, and held a meeting with them to discuss online registration and applications. These need to be advertised, so we had a good discussion on the best ways to reach students and this may lead to our opinions being sought for the Steering Groups looking at these two online projects.

University Admissions Website

On Wednesday of 2nd week, I met with the Enquiries Manager of the Undergraduate Admissions Office, to talk about the University Admissions Website. She was very keen to have some students working with her to improve the layout and content, so I'll be sending something out to Common Room Admissions Reps about this in the near future. She was also very helpful in offering some space to advertise Target Schools events on the website, and allowing me to use the news item sections for the same purpose.

We also talked about the Alternative Prospectus, and following this I shall be sending some copies up to the Admissions I so that students can collect as much information as possible in one place.

Learning Development Advisor

Ben Yudkin was appointed as the new Learning Development Advisor at the end of last term, and is now in post and getting to grips with the structure of the University! Andrea and I had a meeting with him last week to talk about study skills ideas that have been tried in the past, and ways we saw him taking these forward over the next couple of years. It is going to be very useful to have this position, and that Ben was keen to talk to us within the first two weeks of starting the job is a very positive sign.

Educational Policy and Standards Committee

Last Friday was the first ESPC meeting of term, with a number of interesting items to consider. Plagiarism is a hot topic in the University at the moment, and the Proctors Office is looking into the use of electronic screening for assignments submitted for assessment in examinations. Some research is being done into the possible ways this could be done, and a decision taken at some point later this year.

The University has commissioned a working group to look at the use of Teaching, Learning and Laboratory Space within Oxford. This is partially because the Consultative Group working on the RI Site plans want to ensure the correct amount of teaching and learning space is provided for in the Humanities Library, but also to ensure that the facilities available are used to the best possible advantage. This group will be starting to meet at the end of term, so any results will start to come through later in the year.

Aldwych Meeting

For those unaware, Alan and I are members of the Aldwych Group; this is a collective of the Presidents and Education Officers at the Student Unions of Russell Group Institutions (the 20

most research-intensive Universities in the UK). Last Friday a meeting was held in Warwick, which I attended as Alan had an interview. To be blunt, Aldwych has not been as useful to us this year as it could be; Cambridge and Oxford are similar only to each other, so even sharing best practice becomes more difficult within a group that we're part of. Discussions at the meeting surrounded whether we should employ an Aldwych Administrator, and a Valentine's Lobby of MPs to be held on the 21st February.

The meetings themselves always take far longer than they should do, and very few decisions were reached. However, members of the group finally accepted that when deciding on something like employing an Administrator, a smaller Working Group to put together all the research necessary in a paper would achieve more than a large, unwieldy committee which has the potential to number 40 people. As such, I have been asked to sit on the Working Party of 5 as the Oxbridge Representative, and I'll no doubt report on this more in the future when the terms of the group have been worked out.

PPH Review

Alan and I attended a meeting with a small group reviewing the position of Permanent Private Halls within the University. This Review, chaired by Sir Colin Lucas, was an excellent opportunity to pass on some of the non-confidential details of casework we've had from PPHs, and to report the problems and perceptions associated with admission to PPHs. The Review has been meeting with groups of students from each PPH, a move which we applaud!

Student Administration Management Group

The first meeting of this group was held on Tuesday, gathering together representatives from colleges, departments and the central administration to discuss how the management of the Student Career can be improved. It was extremely useful to meet the people involved in all stages of student administration, and I have arranged to meet several of them outside of that group.

One major point that came out of the group is that communication in Oxford is poor, and very few in the room knew what others were responsible for and hence where to recommend their students go. At the end of the meeting, I asked the group whether they would like more information on the Student Union and the answer was a resounding yes. I was anticipating a couple of sides of A4 but have been asked to give briefings at a couple of meetings this term, including at Senior Tutors Committee. This should mean that more people than ever in the University know what we do, and how we can help their students and them. I just need to get to grips with powerpoint... Andrea and I will be working on a Guide to OUSU, which can be sent to anyone wanting to know more about OUSU, not just University members. Watch this space...

Imran Khan

V-P (Charities and Community)

ALTERNATIVE CAREERS FAIR

It's finally over! Big thanks to Olly Carr, Helen Bagshaw, Tom Wrathmell, Alan Strickland and Andrea Miller for all their help with getting the Alternative Careers Fair off the ground on Saturday, it was a big success. We had about 1000 people in Exam Schools and the feedback was really positive. If anyone wants a copy of the accompanying guide, email me at alternativecareersfair@ousu.org to request a copy and I'll pidge it out.

There were over 20 speakers, over 60 stalls, and the guide looks brilliant (if I do say so myself).

RAG

Big week for RAG - it's the RAG Battle of the Bands TONIGHT from 8pm in the Cellar. The lineup includes Sub-Func, the Lonely Echoes, L-Shaped Room and Dot's Funk Odyssey, and all proceeds go to charity; get your arses down there.

Tomorrow it's the RAG International Food Fair, a great chance to escape the drudgery of Hall or your housemate's cooking by heading down to the East Oxford Community Centre for a £5 all-you-can-eat food bonanza, with loads of restaurants from all around Oxford contributing.

The deadline for applications to the RAG Skydive is TODAY, so let me know if you want to make a last minute entry; it'll be on Saturday of 7th Week.

We had Speed Dating and Eclectic last week, both of which were really successful, so thanks to everyone who came along.