



## reports to council 3rd week trinity term 2002

**Ruth Hunt**

**President**

My, don't the weeks just fly by? I have spent the last two weeks attending various meetings that are a necessary component of my life including pubs board and the shop committee. Motions to follow no doubt. I have also spent a large portion of my time dealing with the fall out from last council. OUSU council, despite its occasional tedium, close adherence to rules and regulations and diverse make up is possibly the most democratic student governing structure in the country. I know of no other student union that goes to such lengths to ensure that every college is included in decision making processes, where individuals in the room are there because their college has faith in their ability to represent their interests, where every effort is made to include as many voices as possible. I could not, even if I wanted to, exclude anybody, stop motions as soon as they come into OUSU or change the policy to suit. Things sometimes don't get discussed, sometimes they do. There is no ideological framework to decide what should and shouldn't and no student, ever, should be under the impression that there is a greater right or greater wrong. Judge motions on their own merit. You make those decisions not me. This week I have been told that I personally should have prevented the motion being put, I should have got it put back a week, I should have made it fail, I should have made it pass with a greater majority. Oh, and, I should adopt the opposite policy in order to satisfy the minority rather than the majority. The restraints on the President to do such things is not an institutional weakness or problem. It is the greatest thing about our democratic structures. So, even though I personally voted against the motion, I accept the policy that it has formulated. And I emphasise that anyone can bring a motion to council about any topic.

It is therefore a shame that the letters I have been mandated to write in the resolves of the motion are breaching Ultra Vires law. As OUSU policy states, I object to the restrictions imposed by the UV laws but I am bound by the fiscal and legal responsibilities of the VP Finance on this matter. I am currently investigating ways to by-pass the legislation and I will let you know in due course.

This week has also been taken up with complaints, answering them and issuing them. All part of the day-to-day running that is ousu. I've also been getting very intimate with the charities laws.

**Eleanor Fletcher**

**V-P (Finance)**

### Student Radio

The situation with this is looking up once again, as you can probably see from the agenda. There have been a number of developments. The idea of web-based broadcasting has been abandoned as not likely to draw in enough listeners as well as causing huge potential problems regarding the use of the university's broadband. Oxford Student Radio (formerly eFusion) have submitted a bid to get some of the HEfCE Higher Education Active Community Funds which now exist to encourage interaction between the students and staff of HE institutions as well as creating new volunteering opportunities. The idea of Oxford Student Radio fits these criteria quite neatly. It has been decided that OSR will aim to broadcast 2 RSLs (these are 28 day long AM licences and you are only allowed 2 per year; they are how most other student stations broadcast), one in Michaelmas and one in Trinity. A cupboard-like room in OUSU will be converted into a studio (this has been approved by the University Surveyors). OSR will be set up under a similar arrangement to the Oxford Student (as is expressed in the motion), these SO and Constitutional changes shall be brought to 5<sup>th</sup> week Council.

[www.ousu.org](http://www.ousu.org)

Now there at last! Please do use it, I hope you enjoy it. If you have any ideas/feedback/outright criticisms, please do email them to [website@ousu.org](mailto:website@ousu.org). It is supposed to be participatory and will

not be unless lots of people get involved. All clubs and societies have been invited to set up a page within the site (they will have access to change the content and I will give them full training for that). If you are involved in a club/soc then please do take us up on this offer: even if you just use it to link to an external website, it is an extra bit of web presence for you which can't hurt and it is free.

#### Publications

We have appointed some more editors. The number of enquiries has been very pleasing and the quality of applicants has been phenomenal; we've had to make some very difficult decisions. Thanks to all who serve on Publications Board for the hours you dedicate to OUSU, we couldn't make such excellent appointments without your input.

#### Freshers' Fair

The two new organisers have really hit the ground running and everything on this front is going well. Forms have been sent out to all our contacts for clubs/socs. If you are a new society, do get in touch by emailing [fair@ousu.org](mailto:fair@ousu.org) and we can send you an applications form. I would like to urge clubs/socs to GET APPLICATIONS IN AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE, there are a limited number of places and we have to operate on a first-come-first-served basis. The deadline is Friday 8<sup>th</sup> Week and there is no guarantee that we will be able to allocate stalls to applications received after that date.

#### Battels

I have seen a number of common room officers about their current rent negotiations in the past couple of weeks. The new Franks Accounts (for the last academic year 2000-2001) were obtained recently and I have been copying these for common room officers to use in their negotiations, as well as talking them through the OUSU handout that we had prepared by a professional accountant last term (the ex-V-P Grads, Jason Dorsett). Please come and see me to talk through rent rises. It appears that a lot of SCRs are arguing for substantial rent rises in order to 'bring their battels in line with the mean'. I hold this to be an insufficient argument: firstly, rises for such a reason will disproportionately affect one generation (by that I mean 3 years) of students (the upcoming first year the most) which will impact on how the college is viewed by potential applicants; secondly, colleges are very rarely bringing what they spend on students 'in line with the mean'; and thirdly, even when a college has spent considerable sums improving student rooms don't forget they also serve as conference guest rooms and higher standards of accommodation are undoubtedly being implemented with that market very much in mind. Additionally, don't forget that there is no mean for provision to students as our recent report into inequality between colleges highlighted so we shouldn't stand for a mean in charges. The OUSU Battels Support Guide 2002 is still available, give me shout if you want a copy ([finance@ousu.org](mailto:finance@ousu.org)) - it is full of negotiation hints and campaigning tips.

#### Ultra Vires

I have ruled against OUSU being able to legally spend money in carrying out the resolves of the Israel/Palestine motion passed at the last council. The matter has been extensively discussed in Exec meetings since then. We have also sought the advice of a lawyer on the particular issue who has declared that such letters would not be in line with our charitable objects ("*to further the educational purposes of the University by representing and promoting the interests of the student membership of the University*" – The Constitution) or charities law. Whilst we do have policy against the laws governing the way in which student unions can spend their money (commonly known as UV), they remain the law and the risks involved in breaking are too great for the individual (ie: the V-P Finance who would authorise the expenditure and thus be personally prosecuted) and too great for the organisation (abuse of the law could lead to a student union having their tax benefits removed from them). I would like to draw people's attention to the Guidance on Student Unions issued by the Department for Education and Employment (September 1995) which is printed in full in the Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum, especially paragraph 13, which reads: "*union funds cannot be used to promote or support campaigns on matters which may be of general interest or concern but which do not affect members of the union*

*as students. Examples would be industrial disputes, general campaigning on environmental matters, eg environmental policies and road building, or the treatment of political prisoners in a foreign country...*" We are, of course, perfectly free to debate any issue we chose and take a stance on that (we are even permitted "reasonable expenditure" on such a debate) which I hope that we will continue to do for many years to come.

#### General Stuff

Quite a lot of computer problems have added to my workload recently. In the recent purchase of new hardware, I have been forced to think more of OUSU's ICT future. Because of major upgrades to operating systems and software, OUSU is going to have to update/upgrade a large proportion of its ICT facilities in the next 5-7 years. At a very rough estimate this essential development will require OUSU to make an investment of £17-20,000. To this end I have decided to prepare an 'OUSU ICT Strategy' document, carefully laying out this expenditure, which I shall bring to Council for approval later in term. An investment of that scale cannot be carried in one financial year for OUSU – the purpose of my paper will be to describe a sensible pattern for that investment to be spread over the next 5 years time so that OUSU's key function as a service provider will not be undermined at the end of that period by having out of date or obsolete computing facilities.

<b>James Rowlands</b>
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<b>V-P (Welfare)</b>
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I have continued to work on the question of accessible facilities for OUSU. The Committee for Diversity and Equal Opportunity (CDEO) endorsed my paper calling for the University to assist OUSU in identifying and acquiring suitably accessible premises. At a central University level the quest for accessible alternative premises is going well. The College groups have been having there first round of training sessions and they have been well received. Some colleges have been slow to take up the opportunities afforded by the new system but I hope this will change as people become more used to the college group structure. There has been a lot of interest in the report into college inequality and I have had a number of discussions with interested parties on this. The ad-hoc committee was meeting before this Council to discuss how to move forward on the issue. The paper itself will be presented to JCC. The Equal Opportunities Group will be having its first meeting on Tuesday of 4<sup>th</sup> week where the final draft of the new guide to equal opportunities will be approved. Once that's done, I will be sending it out to common room officers and I hope it will be useful aid in helping people digest and act on the huge amount of new legislation that it now beginning to come on line. The last meeting of the CDEO discussed the Universities soon to be issue policy on race equality as demanded by the RRAA. It has also become accepted that it is in the Universities interest to produce an integrated equality policy, covering all the issue from harassment and discrimination to the promotion of diversity, and OUSU will be feeding into this. The various OUSU groups I work with continue to do their thing, some more effectively than others. The new website is working and there is a large section on student advice which I would encourage people to us. Apparently the University wants to review the position of the OUSU Student Advisor. While I am happy to outline the procedures that she (and indeed the entire service) work under I will be making it clear that as they do not fund the post then what we choose to do with our money it really our business. Of course if they would like to fund the Service, including provision for OUSU to employee a second part time Advisor, then I would be much more willing to discuss the theoretical aspects of welfare provision with them. This does not however mean that they should, or could, claim a role in running the Student Advice Service that after all exists for the very reason that it provides independent (from the 'collegiate University') advice and support for students. Still this is a fairly well rehearsed argument that comes up like clockwork, although given OUSU spends a small fortune on student welfare it would seem sensible that the University takes on some of this financial burden and allow us to do our work without worrying about the state of the world economy. The Peer Support Review is ongoing and I have made a submission to the review

panel and will be giving evidence in a couple of weeks. Casework for individual students continues and I have been providing the standard range of support and advice to common room welfare providers.

**Antonia Bance**

**V-P (Women)**

These last two weeks have flown by.

Last week I attended a meeting of the university Childcare Panel, which was really productive, well-chaired and able to accomplish great things. I think there is a real willingness in this university to make life easier for student parents and to encourage more student parents to apply. I was glad to see that the new university nursery is well on the way to being opened next Christmas, and that this will provide fifty new nursery places for the children of staff and the 26 students currently on the awaiting list. The university is also allocating the final round of childcare funding for this academic year soon, so please encourage any student parents experiencing financial hardship to find out about applying for the money from me or the University Equal Opportunities Department. Finally the Student Parent Handbook has come back from the printers – all common rooms should have received several copies, but of course, should you need any more or if you or any of your students have queries, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

I've also started work on the all-new OUSU Guide to Eating Distress (working title), which should incorporate information for welfare providers and those affected by eating distress, as well as contacts and some personal accounts.

Hopefully for the last time I will say in a report that lots of my time has been spent overhauling our elections process. Sorry it didn't come to Council this week, I just didn't get it finished in time. Looking forward to a good debate next week, hope you all get a chance to read the document thoroughly before the next Council– it's not so much of a chore, as at least it's now written in English and is 9,000 rather than 21,000 words.

Some of my time in the last week has been spent dealing with Life. They have written to every student union asking to include an advertisement in their welfare publications. OUSU believes that students facing an unplanned pregnancy should be offered impartial, non-directive support to enable them to make their own informed decision; as a student union we believe that Life's pregnancy care hotline is not a non-directive service, and so consequently we do not accept advertising from them (Council policy, MT 2000, Week 3). I did some further research on the support offered by Life: on the basis of these conversations, I dispute that the Life pregnancy care helpline offers non-directive and non-judgemental advice, as many of the comments made are factually inaccurate, and show evidence of attempts to force both judgemental and directive opinions on callers. I wrote, with James, to Life, refusing their advertising and explaining our reasons why; I would advise any colleges who have received such material from Life not to use it, and instead to approach the Student Advice Service if they have any queries about unplanned pregnancy.

Other stuff I have done: running the Nightbus, continuing to work on the Women's Open Day, helping individual college officers to plan events, casework, going to the Committee for Equal Opportunities and Diversity, planning events for the Women's Campaign, interviewing freshers' fair and publications editors, interviewing mentoring applicants and all the other jobs that can't be defined but help to keep this student union running.

**Jeff Williams  
(Graduates)**

**V-P**

This has been an exciting first two weeks more officially on the job since election in council last meeting. Since then, I have continued to get in touch with many graduates and university leaders - it's been a combination of continuing to get myself out there and aiming to get things done.

Now that people know I am on the job for the next several months, I am getting a bit more attention. For representation, I met with seven MCR presidents (or committee leaders) and a few graduate representatives. The main emphasis of discussion was how OUSU can serve them even better and what we aimed to accomplish between now and the close of summer.

As far as formal meetings go, there were four significant ones since my vacation report. First, in meeting with Proctors (and Assistant Proctor), we discussed the most salient concerns of graduate students and brainstormed ideas for the joint Proctors and Assessor meeting with both JCRs and MCRs on

13 May. The Proctors and Assessor are new to their posts and particularly enthusiastic about working with OUSU and furthering the needs of graduates. Next, I attended the Childcare Panel with VP- Women, Antonia Bance. This was an opportunity to discuss first hand about the childcare deficits (but improvements) in the Oxford area. I noted that while there were staff-parent representatives on the panel, there were no student parents. I will explore what is involved with adding a student parent to that committee. Also, I attended the International Students Committee meeting. Here we are planning to reach out to several societies and do some joint social events. For the summer, we plan to put together some tools (e.g., banking guide) and enhance the International Students guide on the web). Finally, I attended the afternoon-long, Graduate Committee of the Council of Colleges - Steering Committee. In this meeting we plan for the large meeting of the Graduate Committee in which each college has representation. This meeting is perhaps the most relevant to graduate students as we cover issues ranging from funding to supervision to space for graduates at Oxford. One concern is that although this committee produces quality papers and recommendations, I sensed a lack of clarity on whether any group or party would be held in any way accountable for recognizing (let alone implementing) our recommendations. I will continue to serve and probe the committee on how we can promote the issues that concern graduates most.

Aside from meetings, I have continued to work with the sabbaticals in the support of OUSU and all Oxford students. We have weekly sabbatical and executive meetings, and we have been meeting to interview candidates who will work on publications this summer. This continue to be moving along, but I realize how quickly term passes. I am still aiming to gather MCR committees for a social event mid-way through term. This will enable more collaboration and planning into the summer. Ideally, we will have a large scale event for graduates during 10th week and on an on-going basis a "graduate night" at a local bar/club. Lastly, I plan to reach out more to mature students, as I have learned that their committee is no longer having official meetings. I look forward to making significant progress in the coming weeks.

**John Craig**

**V-P (AcAff)**

OUSU's new website has at last provided Academic Affairs with the means to engage meaningfully with large numbers of students about the aspects of their academic experience that actually matter, which are often detailed and subject-specific. We have long striven to bring JCC reps, Divisional Board reps and Academic Affairs officers together in one place, and have succeeded, if only virtually. Frankly, endless meetings about our degrees were never the most interesting of prospects, and we now aim to build a culture in which the average PPE-ist can comment on, say, their IT module, between reading the paper and checking the cinema listings. While it is easy to get carried away about 'online citizenship', we really do feel that we can make much quicker progress now, and are already putting the site to great use in our work on a student charter. Target Schools has an Open Day this Saturday, for which we have been working hard as ever. This Open Day is much smaller than the others, partly because we have been surprised by people's determination to revise for AS Levels on a Saturday a number of weeks ahead of the exams. However, the huge increase in overall equivalent activity should be acknowledged, and we are not at all down-hearted. If we can make a success of an Open Day in September, we might need to look again at the nature of the mid-Trinity event. Happily, our

email problems at OUSU are all but over, and our volunteer database will be back up and running in the next few days, to the relief of both ourselves and the University, who increasingly rely on OUSU for event volunteers. Mentoring is progressing well, with all this year's intake now interviewed. The training of those accepted onto the project takes place on Monday and Tuesday of 6th week, and they will begin mentoring in Michaelmas. For much of this year, I have felt responsible for the project both across the University and within schools, but lacked the organisational clout to iron out problems as they arose. Having had an extremely useful meeting with the Directors of Blackbird Leys Education Action Zone and the Department for Educational Studies, I feel we have made a good job of rationalising the organisational structure. I am happy that I will be handing over the mentoring portfolio in a much more comprehensible state than that in which I found it. More generally on the web site, my main focus now is to transfer [www.targetschools.com](http://www.targetschools.com) onto the new Oncampus site, so as to ensure its durability, and to make easier the lives of subsequent VPs Acaff. This will involve some paid student involvement, so if you are a skillful web designer interested in earning a bit of money, please email [access@ousu.org](mailto:access@ousu.org). The next phase will then be producing a transition site for [www.alternativeprospectus.com](http://www.alternativeprospectus.com), in anticipation of the launch of a bigger site alongside the new edition. I have also had quite a lot of casework this fortnight, including a trip to London in a representative capacity. This is, by its very nature, an invisible part of OUSU's work, but at times invaluable to the members involved.