



reports to council 3rd week trinity term 2002

Ruth Hunt

President

The last two weeks have largely been taken up with my work connected to securing a central student venue for Oxford students. Due to the laboriously slow nature of this work and the commercial sensitivity connected with the project, I won't go into more detail here but please be assured that nothing will take place without council's say so, and if everything goes to plan, there will be a motion to next council with sufficient warning. Trust me on this one.

Other things: F&F is going well despite the slight problem that Mr Wotnot decided to lose our email list. This means that if you were originally on the F&F list, you are no longer on it. So, if you want to sign up again, please email me president@ousu.org and I will get you on there some how. Or email the co-chairs. Otherwise, at this time of flux, it is rapidly becoming clear that the agenda of f&f must (albeit temporarily) change. The increased financial pressures on the universities in the UK means that there is higher expenditure per student than they receive in funding. The implications of these changes are vast, including a changing attitude to battels and service charges. I hope that college representatives found Mr Van Noorden useful last week. For those who missed it, here is a brief synopsis of what was said (thanks to those who wrote this as I have been a little manic this week).... The income of colleges, roughly speaking, comes from four sources: income from endowments, fees, charges and outside money (donations and the like). The first three account for about a third each, the fourth is often negligible in the long run. The general thinking behind the expenditure decisions of a college is that the endowment income is to subsidise education (fees), but that accommodation (charges) should break even. However, recently some of the richer colleges may have moved towards subsidising accommodation from endowment income as well.

What the Joint Committee on Fees and Charges does is to forecast what is needed in order to ensure that fees and charges go up to meet inflation as it affects Oxford colleges and hence continue to cover the cost of accommodation (entirely) and of education (without drawing too much from endowment income). The Van Noorden index is different for fees and charges, for each it is calculated on the collective expenditure of each college. Hence, fees include academic salaries, library, office, equipment and an element of the domestic; charges include catering, domestic staff wages, water, electricity, etc. This is incidentally the difference between statements IV and V. The Van Noorden index for charges and for fees ensures that the colleges stay level, but does not allow for any improvements to be made.

There are two levels of concern for students regarding Van Noorden then – one is to do with how rents will be affected, the other with the threat of top up fees.

If rents rise with Van Noorden, they will always rise more than the country wide inflation (and hence more than loans, parental income, etc). The index goes up by more than inflation in the long run probably because it is based a lot more heavily on wages (and on services). It is not like the retail price index; staff wages dominate (and earning figures go up more than prices, because of the rising cost of living). Another factor might be that the RPI is backward looking, whilst Van Noorden is forward looking. The University no longer negotiates directly with the government over how much fees should be increased by – the Van Noorden fees index is no more than a pointer for the government to know where the University should be at. It also serves to regulate the overseas (top-up) fee. This fee is at present about 15% higher than the per capita fee that the colleges receive for each student from the block grant allocated by the government to the University. In addition, the college fee is now also meant to be covered by the per capita amount of money to each home/EU student – and this too has been squeezed. And hence the funding gap – only overseas fees actually render the colleges self sufficient. The Van Noorden index on charges is only to stay level, not to do better, so wouldn't it be reasonable to expect colleges to charge over this not just if they want to improve their facilities but also if the funding awarded to them to cover fees for home/EU students is insufficient?

It should be clear that I have not written this and it is only an interpretation but I hope it clears up a few things.

Ok, other stuff. Since the demise of Juice at Park End, the traditional freshers fling has also gone. So, OUSU are working with a club promoter to do a different night on Tuesday and Wednesday at Park End. More info to follow but please let me know when your freshers week starts so I can give you appropriate tickets

Ok. That's all.

Eleanor Fletcher

V-P (Finance)

Publications

The Oxford Student has been running reasonably smoothly the last couple of weeks. Publications Board have appointed an Oxford Directory Editor and a Freshers' Guide Editor recently, as well as a very good Assistant Business Manager. Arranging and chairing Publications Board has generally been the main thing I have been working on recently. I would like to draw people's attention to the vacancy for the Associate Editor of the Oxford and Cambridge Careers Handbook: this is largely being produced in Cambridge this year but we would like someone absolutely brilliant to head up Oxford's input.

The Budget

This took some work but I am very pleased with the finished product. I am pleased that I was able to predict a sizeable surplus as it would be a good idea for OUSU to replenish its reserves; it will also allow my successor more room for manoeuvre in case of fluctuating market circumstance which can only be a sound plan. The drastic cuts that I was forced to make in the Amended Budget last term have actually, I believe, removed a significant expenditure which turns out not to be that necessary when the chips are down. The biggest change is the creation of the Diversity Week budget heading. I hope that this serves two purposes: firstly to demonstrate what an important part of the OUSU year this has become; and secondly, to focus the minds of those involved in OUSU's various equal opportunities campaigns (Women's Anti-Racism, Queer Rights, International Students and Disabilities Action) on Diversity Week as being their one opportunity in the year to splash out and do something really special. Next year we produce many of OUSU's biennial publications which explains why our expenditure is higher than this year's was.

Student Radio

The good news is that this project has been approved for HEfCE funding but those allocating it will need more details which I have begun working on. The University Surveyors have approved using the cupboard in OUSU as a studio so all seemed to be going quite smoothly. Unfortunately, in the last few days we have learnt that there may be some problems obtaining an RSL licence because of Radio Authority rules relating to overlap with commercial licences (one of which is about to be awarded in Oxford). The situation is by no means clear and depends very much on who is awarded the commercial licence currently held by Fusion Radio.

General Stuff

Dealing with computer problems, lugging boxes of paper up the stairs, helping with Shop deliveries – all these things and many other slightly mundane but hugely essential tasks take up most of my time, hardly worth boring you all with in my report.

James Rowlands

V-P (Welfare)

The last two weeks have been rather busy and a significant amount of my time taken up with individual casework. In addition I have been working with a number of common room officers on issues that concern them. I have also been working on some of OUSU's summer publications, including the selection of editors for the LGBT Handbook and the Careers for Queers Guide. We are still looking for an editor to take on the Anti-Racism Handbook so anyone who is interested should get in touch with me on welfare@ousu.org. I have also been having discussions about the Oxford Survival Guide and hope to be able to ease Andrew's workload on this front significantly next year. As ever I have been plugging away at bits of the website, and thanks to John for his help on this front. Queer Rights issued some very cool anti-homophobia posters (which are incidentally on the website go to the Queer Rights section on www.ousu.org/main/campaigns). I hope that they stimulate discussion and go some way to making people consider the genuine problem that is still posed by homophobia and the importance of confronting discrimination and prejudice in our midst. We also had a good speaker in about Transgender issues. Likewise Disabilities Action has also been active this week in promoting the issues the campaigns works on. Thanks to Mohammed Dhalech, the University Equal Opportunities Officer for speaking at a meeting of the anti-racism group. I have prepared a paper for JCC on the future of the OUSU Student Advisor (and by default the OUSU Student Advice Service) and would be happy to discuss this with people who are interested. The condoms saga continues and I will be soon place a vast order to meet the demand

from common rooms. Preparations for handover are underway and I will be starting to tow Andrew round like my shadow sometime soon. In general the last two weeks have been a bit hectic, which explains why this report is rather short.

Antonia Bance

V-P (Women)

It's been a fun two weeks.

I've continued to work on the OUSU Guide to Eating Distress (working title). The Elections Review has finally come to Council. Women's Campaign has been organising an event with Random House about Women in Afghanistan, which happened last night. I've been working on the website, and doing lots of Vice-Presidential student union development tasks.

Again, much of my time in the last two weeks has been spent dealing with anti-abortion organisations. In particular, I have been trying to make clear OUSU's policy on abortion, unplanned pregnancy and directive advice and support. Anyone who is still not clear, please go to www.ousu.org/main/campaigns/prochoice before OUSU Council.

Just for a week, I have known what it is to be the President of OUSU and constantly have the student press asking you for clarification about abortion and election regulations. In addition, in the current atmosphere of anti-abortion agitation in Oxford, I have helped Women's Campaign organise a piece of pro-choice action on Cornmarket on Saturday, to oppose the "Life Walk" through town. This is completely in accordance with OUSU policy, and I hope all of Council (men and women) will join us in defending the right to choose. At this time we are seeing attacks on abortion provision and emergency contraception in the UK and beyond, with George Bush's refusal to fund international family planning organisations that provide information about abortion and the recent legal challenge to the over-the-counter availability of emergency contraception. It's vitally important that people who believe in the right to choose defend it in Oxford on Saturday. Meet at 11.30am at Carfax, bring placards, friends and loudspeakers! Whether a woman wants to continue with her pregnancy, or to terminate it, OUSU believes each woman has the right to make the best decision for her, and at the end of the day she is the only person who can make that decision. No more, no less.

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 university committees and meeting senior members, interviewing publications editors, and all the other jobs that can't be defined but help to keep this student union running.

Jeff Williams

V-P (Graduates)

Since we are approaching the last quarter of term, I thought I would begin this sab report by reviewing where I was at the start of term. I have decided to return to the format, which lays out the four components of my service to the University. It is quite amazing to think that I have been in this role for nearly 3 months. As this University is a complicated organization, I have used this period both to learn as much as I could about my role, to address individual issues that arose and to take action on a few plans. Unlike the other sabbaticals, I am nowhere near the end of my term of service – I am not even at the halfway point. I look forward to continuing to serve through August. Since my time in this role is not as long as most sabbatical officers, however, I think I should close this summary with a realistic discussion of what I hope to do from now and to the end of the summer. Indeed, this has been and looks to continue to be a challenging, rewarding and exciting role.

Representation

As I have mentioned before, the bulk of my efforts to become an effective representative of Oxford's students have come in the form of "getting myself out there." Fortunately, I continue to meet plenty of graduate students nice enough to share their stories and perspectives. Notably, I work regularly with MCR Presidents and OUSU reps with the intention of getting more collaboration and interaction among different MCR leaders. We have been focusing on a few key issues that I can tackle in the coming week. Some include supervisor relationships, transcripts, exam re-sits, visiting student issues and increased collaboration among MCRs. The main meetings for which I served as a representative since last meeting include University Council, the Graduate Committee for the Council of Colleges and the International Students Committee. Informally, I have been meeting with the Assistant to the Proctors,

the Senior and Junior Proctors and the Assessor. Since they are keen to help graduates at Oxford, I have been in regular communication about issues that are arising for individual and groups of students.

Advice/Casework

I find that some of the greatest influences in this role are in the form of individual casework. OUSU's non-directive advice assistance is delivers a customized service to any student who calls. I have had the chance to listen to act and in some cases to refer students on to other offices. To date I have handled three significant pieces of casework and have served as an advisor to a handful of graduate students on matters ranging from employment, to housing to postponement of exams. Students have also utilised my ability to serve as a "witness" in meetings important to their academic future. I continue to enjoy having an open door policy and encouraged students to come to me about any issues that come up. In this capacity I will serve graduate, mature and international student needs.

Publications

I am responsible for making sure that graduate issues are represented in OUSU publications. To date, I have participated in interviews for future editors of publications like the Oxford handbook. I am laying out plans to review this year's graduate guide and would hope to put a plan in place to explore whether there needs to be a revision of the International Students Handbook. I have been working to enhance the OUSU website and its section for graduate students. As this is a sizable task, other sabbatical officers like Antonia Bance are helping me secure content for certain groups of graduate students. If you do visit <http://www.ousu.org>, you will find a section devoted to graduate students. It includes useful contact numbers and should contain minutes and agendas of meetings like Postgraduate Assembly.

Campaigns

While I have not engaged in any campaign planning to date, I continue to have had my ear out for different issues that are growing in importance to Oxfords students, especially its post grads. I understand from reviewing certain budget and other data that there may be room for me to work with graduates to plan a campaign in the summer. Mainly, I find that getting things done for graduate students is most effectively in the form of negotiation and individual discussions. I plan to "campaign" for individual colleges to interact more and plan to have more gatherings throughout the summer. Lastly, I have been beginning to analyse a graduate survey conducted by Nick Smith (in 2001). I would hope to summarize these findings and use them to organize any campaign ideas for Andrew Garlick who will take over the role of VP Grads in September.

Goals Moving Forward

Given that there are barely two weeks left in term, I need to be realistic about what I intend to accomplish for graduate students in my role as VP Grads. I can still be ambitious, as I will have a long summer (through the end of August) with few distractions from achieving my main goals. Basically, if I can come away having created more collaboration among MCR/GCRs at individual colleges and if I can improve the nature of graduate students relationship with the college and department, I will consider this experience a success. In the coming PA meeting, I will have my first chance to raise the key concerns that graduate students have been raising with me, and together we can come up with the desired methods for me to plan to tackle the main issues within the two broad areas raised. Feel free to contact me at any time, so that I can use this position for the greatest benefit to graduate students.

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| John Craig | V-P (AcAff) |
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This week I have been helping out with the website, which I continue to believe is going to be central to OUSU's future work. All exec members are now able to upload images along with web content, so the site should continue to improve apace. We have also sorted out how to run an automatic email sign-up system for OUSU campaigns - infallible and requiring no administration. If you are involved in an OUSU campaign for which this would be useful, ask your executive officer to sort it out for you. If you are a JCR officer who sees how much all this would help your work in college, well your right, it would. Talk to Eleanor or myself about getting a college website with all these advantages: No, it wouldn't have to have an OUSU logo on it - it could look however you like No, it wouldn't entail trumpeting a web address with OUSU in it Yes, it would be a great way to communicate with your JCR at ease, and to make your whole committee accountable. Cool.

I have been working hard to organise the training of new mentors for next year, and finalises the changes to the administration for the scheme. I hope that all we be extremely sorted by handover. NMPP

Training takes place next Monday and Tuesday at the Department for Educational Studies. See the Campaigns section of www.ousu.org for more info.

On the Target Schools front, I think I have persuaded the university of the importance of an online feedback form, that would be capable of accepting information from the whole range of student-led access initiatives. It is of course vital that the Admissions Office's new database allow it to build up as accurate a picture of each school's experience of Oxford so far, and this is crucial to making that a reality. We have been working hard to ensure that the final Target Schools Open Day of term (Wednesday of 9th week) is a big success. The day has been extremely popular, and everything is going well and we are all looking forward to it. I'm just getting the hang of this sab lark!

Academic affairs is progressing well. The biggest thing to report is that last Friday at the sub-committee of University Council that deals with teaching and learning, we discussed OUSU's College Inequality Report at length. It is a report that has made a real impact, and drew from senior members the most honest and perceptive set of responses I have heard from them all year. Big improvements in academic provision will happen because of this report, and it is to the credit of all those involved. Those who say that a student union cannot achieve meaningful change have yet again been revealed as delusional pessimists (sermon over). JCCs are beginning to go online, and I am working hard to bring new JCCs into the loop. Work on the Student Charter and Exam Failure has slowed over the past fortnight, but I promise I'm on the case. Check out where we've got to in the academic affairs section of the website, and take the chance to have your say.

I have also had a great deal of exam-related casework, have started to work on a handover for Sonia, and the sabs have generally been working extremely hard on more general stuff. Once again, many thanks to the twin for showing me one end of a computer from the other.