



termly reports
michaelmas 2007

Lewis Iwu

President

Hi everyone

It's been a rollercoaster ride of a term but sadly we are now at the end. A brief outline of issues

Student Representation

The conference of colleges recently endorsed the principle of having student representatives on college governing bodies, which redresses the concerns raised in the last QAA report. Furthermore your executive officers are in talks with the University with regards to the status of student representatives on University Committees and their ability to hear reserved business.. More developments to follow

Staffing

Ed Batty who has worked at OUSU as the business manager has been an invaluable asset to the Student Union and now returns to his studies. On behalf of the Student Union I wish to thank Ed for his work on what was the most financially successful summers in recent memory and of course that has a large effect on the resources that we can plug straight back into student resources.

Security Panel

Things in the pipeline...

Central Student Centre Working Party – Will begin working next week contact me if you are interested

OUSU Funding Review – a new model for funding your student union – more details to follow

Have a great holiday everyone

Kaushal Vidyarthee

V-P (Graduates)

Council Report, MT 08, 7th Week
Kaushal Vidyarthee : VP (Graduates)
Hello!!

I had some university committees' meeting in last weeks or so.

-The EPSC approved many recommendations of the graduate panel and I am very hopeful.

-The University council meeting had nothing for us except a pre-council presentation on the energy consumptions by the university.

-The language centre committee is working on its five year strategic plan and it was discussed that the long waiting lists for foreign language learning by non-specialist graduate students and international students are a matter of concern and must be addressed in the plan.

- I also had a meeting with Clubs Committee and it was emphasized that there is a need of better publicity for financial assistance schemes for non-sports clubs and societies. The funding allotted for this scheme in the last year was not fully used due to less and poor applications.
- The student written submission was tabled at the IAMB meeting this week.
- In the graduate committee of the conference of college meeting I raised the issue of graduate students who were given admission offers by the departments but not by the colleges.
- The ISC is going to have another open meeting eighth week. Moreover, the initial discussions were made regarding the Oxford International Festival. It was also decided to set up a separate committee for the planning and management of this particular event. A co-chair for the campaign was elected in the last committee meeting.
- The Mature Students' Campaign working group will meet soon for discussing various things.
- The SAS work has been going smoothly.
- The postgraduate assembly/evening (PGA) was organized on 25th November, Tuesday of seventh week at the University Club.

Rachel Cummings

V-P (Women)

Enough

Had a great term, have increased resources to use, seen an increased turnout and we're looking forward to celebrating its second birthday next term. We (Sian, Ben and I, the co-ordinators) have had a number of supervisions with Elizabeth Treasure of the counselling service to talk through issues that have arisen and think about how to improve the group.

Safety Bus

The first batch of Oxford University volunteers have been trained, and from emails I have received there seems to be an increase in use by our students. I've been working with Brookes to ensure a good service, we're putting a new message on the answer phone for the bus for example giving out taxi numbers and alternative travel arrangements when the bus is unable to pick someone else. There've been adverts for the bus in every OxStu this term, take down the number and put it in your mobile. In the mean time, we always need more volunteers: if you're interested come and talk to me at council or email women@ousu.org.

Student Parents

Tea and Toys is going well, we've had three sessions and there'll be two more before Christmas, the Student Parent Orientation was great earlier this term and the Student Parent Handbook was sent out to all the student parents we're aware of. I'm working with Felicity Cooke and Keith Zimmerman to get a full list of parents and to change the University regulations of parking spaces for those with dependents.

Sexual Assault and domestic abuse

The resources for students who experience either of these is inadequate in Oxford. To see what else OUSU can provide I had a meeting with the head of sexual and domestic abuse for Oxford city, the equivalent for the county and two specially trained police officers in assault who work on training and outreach on this issue. We plan to start by running a (probably) day-long training session for anyone working in welfare near the beginning of next term, and see from that how best to support those working on the issue in the University. Having spoken to our Student Advisor we are also looking into getting Lisa trained as a Domestic Abuse Champion, a county wide scheme for people in any organisation which might be approached on these issues.

Access

Having decided that the Women's Open day was not working in it's previous format I've had three meetings with different people involved with access to work out what else we could be doing. As such plans are in place to work with Univ to have a 'women's marquee' on their grounds during the general open days in June where potential applicants can meet current students and hear about why they should apply to Oxford. I'm also working with the St John's access officer to organise a Women in Politics day in May to increase female applicants in that particular area, we're currently working on getting speakers both from within and outside the University and have booked rooms, lunch and advertised it in the new prospectus. I've also spoken to Naomi Capell of the central access team about creating an e-mentoring scheme for women. This will begin with training in the new term for volunteers and then they'll be matched up with women considering applying to mentor them through the application process.

WomCam

Has been wonderful, we've had really successful events this term including: Wear It Pink, Reclaim The Night, Gender Equality Week, WomCam dinner, New Pie Manifesto Discussion, Feminist Book Group, Women In Film, Tea and Board Games. The committee are all really competent and dedicated, which makes it such a good campaign. We've just elected a new events co-ordinator and will be electing new co-chairs shortly. Our campaign for next term is called Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds, while we're also starting to plan a V-day event for February and LadyFest for Trinity.

Oxford Union and debating

We held a women's getting involved session and a women's debating and public speaking workshop, both of which were very successful and very well attended, thanks to all those who helped out: Melanie Bunce, Lewis Turner, Anna Lewis, Kiri Kopche, Katherine Terrel, Dani Quinn, Lizzy Bauer. Myself and the WomCam co-chairs met with the president elect to discuss next term, we're going to make the public speaking/debating sessions a weekly or fortnightly event, hold another women getting involved session and I'll be sitting on the interview panel for the newly created position of Women's Officer.

Study Skills

Held two sessions one for humanities and one for sciences, both were well attended (although humanities more so) and we got really positive feedback. This is a starting point for future work on study skills, and will feed into the finals forums at the end of next term and beginning of Trinity. All the tutors involved were excellent.

Events and meetings: SJC women's dinner, exeter women's drinks, MCR PresCom, 3 JCR PresComs and will attend another of each next week, NUS extraordinary conference, whole sab meetings with Keith Zimmerman and Michael Sibly and JCC, got Gender Panel and the Committee for Student Health and Welfare, and a meeting with the Proctors in the next two weeks.

Any questions or want more info on anything contact: women@ousu.org.

Jack Wellby (Charities)	V-P
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I've tried to be a busy bee this term and I'm delighted with the progress I have made and the campaigns/societies which fall under my remit have made. Much of the success of this term has been down to Daniel Lowe (Part-time exec Environment and Ethics) and Tom Haynes (Part-Time Exec Charities and Community Outreach). It has been a pleasure working with you both and I am lucky enough to continue to work with both of you – Daniel – congratulations on your re-election and Tom as RAG President...and maybe more!

I'll continue with my read-easy bullet point format but I'll try to be brief as we have an election to run:

Funding:

* I met numerous times with Richard Jarman who is the head of Government and Community Relations in the university. I am pleased to report that a 6 page submission proved successful and the university are paying 60% rather than 46% of my wage this year.

* The situation will be reviewed in January as the whole funding system is being overhauled – there is no guarantee of funding for next year therefore.

RAG:

* As stated in my manifesto this time last year transforming RAG was a major aim of this year. So far we have:

- o Elected the largest committee Oxford RAG has ever had (14 people) and they are all brilliant.

- o Changed when our next elections will be to the end of Hilary Term to increase fresher involvement.

- o Raised over £3000 through street collections – including £1580 from 8 of us in Reading!

- o Ran Oxford's Got Talent

- o Ran In The Pink

- o Started up the RAG casino and it has been a success in 5/5 college events so far and has bookings for 3 more this term and into the future. It's awesome – train as a volunteer croupier!

- o We'll be collecting at the Varsity Match

- o We are holding a raffle at Bridge on Tuesday with Pulse.

* We have big plans for next term and will raise a lot of money. RAG week will be in 5th week next term. Please inform entz and charity reps that they should run a charity night on Friday of 5th.

* Thanks to our sponsors – Accenture.

E & E:

* Elected a new committee last week

* Look out for your E&E Christmas shopping list – hitting pres-list soon!

* Daniel completed the college survey the results of which were covered by the OxStu.

* We have written letters to supermarkets as part of a 'Palm Oil' Campaign.

* We will be giving awards to shops which do good environmentally, ethically or both.

Community:

* Working closely with Richard Jarman.

* Took part in forum on Jewish/Muslim relations.

* Campaigning for improved cycle safety on the path off Parks Road.

* Attended numerous local council meetings and have arranged for the Lord Mayor to come to speak to OUSU Council next term to hear our views.

* Working with the university and student committee on next years University yearbook.

* There will be a 'Beyond Profit: Ethical and Community Careers Fair' next term on the 14th February.

Student Volunteering:

- * Working closely with the Oxford HUB student volunteering projects have been springing up everywhere and it's an exciting time to be involved.
- * I was made a trustee of Oxford HUB.
- * We'll be working to formalise the relationship between OxHub and OUSU over the next two terms.

General OUSUness:

- * Was on elections Committee ... what fun!
- * It's all going well but has been difficult with staff coming and going. It'll settle down and next term will be better than ever.

I'm sure there is stuff I've missed out but it's 50 minutes until the elections close and I think that might be more important!

I nominate the Three Goats Heads as our pub today...no reason :-)

It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do little - do what you can.
~Sydney Smith

Rosanna McBeath

V-P (Welfare)

Hello All, I hope you've had a great term so far! These last couple weeks have been hectic! I hope everyone has a chance to recover over the break!

Welfare Committee: Has been great, we've had a huge turnout at the last two meetings, and hopefully this will continue with our last meeting of term. It is on Wednesday at 6 in the OUSU Offices, please encourage all of your common room welfare officers to come along. I also want to thank all of the welfare officers finishing this term for all of their work and help. They have done fantastic jobs! We are looking to implement a new training program for welfare officers for next term, which will hopefully encourage more people to attend, but also allow other common room officers who need listening skills training to receive it. There will be more information on this over the break, so check your inboxes!

We are starting to organise Mental Health week for next term. We are having a meeting on Monday at 5 in the OUSU Offices which is open to everyone interested in helping out. If you are interested please come along or drop me an email. We are going to start planning what events we want etc, so if you want an input on the direction of the event, please come along.

The Student Advice Service is ticking along well. It has been great having a Student Advisor this term. Lisa has been invaluable to the service. We have had a busy term in terms of casework, and everyone on the team has been doing a fantastic job. If you or anyone you know needs impartial and confidential advice or information on anything from academics to accommodation, please get in touch. email advice@ousu.org

LGBTQ Council [Undefined] is going well. There has been a new temporary chair elected. Elections for the committee for next year will take place next term. We are looking at bringing a motion at the beginning of next term, condemning the new marriage laws in the states. We are also looking at running a campaign on lesbian sexual health, and having a couple of speaker events. I will email around details once we have dates to send around.

The Racial Equality Campaign is also going along well. They have also had to replace the position of chair, so there are now two new co-chairs of the campaign. They are planning on having an open meeting next week. I will send around details once I have them.

Over this term I have been having regular meetings with Keith Zimmerman, the new Director of Student Administration and Services. We have been looking at various welfare issues, such as disability provision, student parents, and how OUSU can feed into the work of the University. These meetings have been very productive, and will hopefully continue over the year. I am currently looking into getting phone numbers for certain welfare services placed on the back of bod cards. Hopefully I will have some progress to report on this by our next meeting. If anyone has any issues they would like me to raise, please feel free to email me and we can discuss it.

I hope everyone has a fantastic winter break, and I'm looking forward to seeing you all next term!

Welfare level
Rosanna xx

James Lamming

V-P (Access & Academic Affairs)

Michaelmas is over – one term down and two to go. Looking briefly back over the term it has first of all been a lot more fun than I expected, but also a lot more work. The last two weeks especially. Quick summary since the last report: interview website up and advertised via interview invites to students; Osney Mead Depository failed to get planning permission but we did write to all the Councillors before hand;; admissions policy has been generating debate in Common Rooms across Oxford; proposal to only give students Prelim retakes under exceptional circumstances sent back to committee for further discussion, and elections happened. Congratulations to Paul Dwyer who will be taking over from me next June. For those who are not reading any further, I wish you a very Happy Christmas and look forward to seeing and working with you in the New Year.

Targets for the Term reviewed

Hidden at the end of my first week report were the following three targets. In the interests of accountability I draw your attention to them again. I said:

“The three key projects I hope to finish this term are:

- *Creating the interview website ready for the upcoming admissions process, and provide training for student interview helpers.*
- *Set up the new OUSU Education Committee as part of the work to improve student academic policy representation.*
- *Complete the Study Skills section on the OUSU Website.”*

Project one is completed: there is an interview website with lots of profiles (but I'm still collecting more), I got 13,000 leaflets delivered out to colleges to include in their interview invites and this week I am producing a guide to running interview helpers and doing a mini-training session with the leaders of the different interview helper teams.

Project two is in progress, though I should probably have made more progress this term. A paper encouraging best practices in student academic policy representation is being brought to Education Policy and Standards Committee in 8th week. We have also met with some of the Social Science Reps to elect their Divisional Board Reps, but there has been no Education Committee meeting or meetings with other divisions yet. Getting this running properly will be a priority for next term.

Project three hasn't happened because it never got high enough on the priority list, though I did run very successful Finalist Form in 3rd week. I hope to make some progress over the Christmas vacation.

In summary, I think I get 1.9 out of 3 on meeting targets for Michaelmas term.

Since my last report:

Access

Interview Website – Interview website now has lots of profiles, though I'm still collecting more. Got myself in a little bit of trouble with the RO for 'threatening' to hold candidates to their word and publish on my blog just who did send me a profile like they'd promised to do so in Central Hustings. Thank you to those who did; shame on those who didn't. Used the episode as a publicity exercise by getting an article in the Cherwell though. Printed 13,000 odd leaflets advertising the site (thank you to the captive volunteers who helped do some trimming on Thursday evening), and distributed them around colleges for their interview invites to draw applicants attention to the profiles.

Target Schools 25th Anniversary Reception in the House of Commons – Spoke with John Grogan MP who set up Target Schools when he was OUSU President 25 years ago about hosting a reception in the House of Commons next year. Now working with University as well to turn this into a big event highlighting all the good work Oxford does on Access.

Oxford Access Scheme – Met with coordinators and discussed how Target Schools and OAS could cooperate in future.

Access Reps Meeting – Discussed draft of Admissions Policy motion currently being discussed in Common Rooms with JCR Access Reps in Kings Arm. Very productive meeting and look forward to more of them in the future.

Admissions Policy Motion – Attended Merton JCR meeting to discuss motion, and will be at Hertford JCR on Sunday. Not sure if motion will be discussed today or wait until next term, but pleased that it has generated such debate across Oxford.

Admissions Executive – Big admissions meeting where Common Framework, second BA entry, recent research on admissions comparing the types of applicants Oxford takes and rejects, and what they then achieve in finals, and reported on Target School plans for the term.

Oxford Ambassadors – I am the 'Key note speaker' (this might be flattering myself) and then running session on 'Being an Ambassador' for new cohort of students on Oxford Ambassadors scheme. This provides training for students in weaker schools but requires them to encourage friends to apply.

Academic Affairs

Prelim Retakes – Senior Tutors Meeting in 6th week discussed and sent back to committee (in plain English, rejected) a proposal that students would only be allowed to retake Prelim exams under exceptional circumstances. There is a motion in this weeks Council about this issue and I am chairing

a working group of JCR Presidents to look at academic and disciplinary procedures in colleges, with the intention of research a best practice report for adoption by all Colleges.

Intermission – Students who have to take time out due to ill health in the past have been described as ‘rusticated’. This is very unhelpful as it implies the time out due to ill health is a punishment. The Senior Tutors meeting adopted proposals to encourage the University to rename such suspensions ‘intermissions’, adopt the principle that each student should be dealt with on an individual basis in a reasonable manner, and that if there are academic conditions set upon return, the student has to be given a reasonable chance of fulfilling them (e.g. by ensuring they have access to libraries). These are all good things.

Osney Mead Depository – Over the past couple of weeks I’ve written letters to all 48 City Councillors informing them of OUSU’s support and given an interview to Fox FM about the depository. Unfortunately the Council voted 26 to 15 against granting planning permission due to concerns about the impact on views, the lack of confidence the University had assessed other suitable sites and because it contradicted the local plan to have 20% renewable energy on site. We will be working with the University and Bodleian Library as it decides what steps to take next. Thank you to Stefan Baskerville, Laura Ellis and Jessica Jones and (JCR Presidents from Univ, Christ Church and Magdalen respectively) who came along to the Council meeting on Monday.

ICT Sub-Committee – Ingrid and I have been co-opted as student members on the University’s new ICT Sub-Committee. We’ll be helping the University formulate and implement its ICT Strategy.

University Meetings – These last two weeks, I had Education Policy and Standards Committee (discussed new Access Strategy which is still in draft form and proposals to have more alternative assessments (e.g. dissertations, extended essays, theses) in all undergraduate courses); EPSC Undergraduate Panel, JCC with Student Members and MPLS JCC/GJCC.

Internal Communications – Met with the new Internal Communications Director, Susannah Wintersgill, to discuss how the University has been communicating with students in the past (mixed results) and how it could improve in the future. She kindly offered to run a focus group on Communications in OUSU to help us improve our own strategies for future terms.

OUSU

SAS Review – Attended hustings at LMH to advocate on behalf of Submission I. Heavy workload prevented much campaigning, but Ingrid and I got up early on election day to put some posters up encouraging students to support Submission I. I look forward to the discussions over the next few weeks about how we take it forward.

SAS – Caught up with a lot of casework paper work, did some new casework, and met with Assessor to discuss how a Student Advisor might work, and how the SAS can cooperate with the Proctors and Assessor more effectively in the future.

Elections – Counted votes all night Thursday (and thank you to everyone else who helped out). That is one part of the job I’m not going to miss next year. Congratulations to Paul Dwyer, who got more votes than any other OUSU Sabbatical and will be the new VP Access and Academic Affairs next year. Paul did a sterling job as Keble JCR President and I’m very confident that OUSU has in him a fantastic VP.

And finally...

Thank you to everyone who has helped, advised and encouraged me this term. Special mentions need to go to Ingrid with all our meetings, Louise for the cake, Martin for pretending to listen and Claire for the sanity breaks. Honourable mentions also for Prescom who have made me feel very welcome and the Student Funding and Access Office for all their advice and enthusiasm.

I hope you enjoy a relaxing and recharging festive break, and all that remains is to wish those reading this a very Merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Claire Addison

V-P (Charities & Community)

Firstly, apologies for failing to submit a report for last council. The whole notion fell out of my head completely.

Communities

Mainly I have been working on a formal written report for the Higher Education Active Community Fund division within the university. This highlighted what I have been doing over the summer and the first half of Michaelmas and was very long and informative and brilliant (hopefully).

I met with Nick Streeter from Fox FM to discuss the Help an Oxfordshire Child appeal, and volunteering in Oxford generally. We've been in touch quite a bit and I'm going to sit on the Fox FM and V Volunteering panel on 11 December to help decide how to allocate £50,000 of funding for local charities.

Along with James (VP Accaff) I went to a meeting about a potential volunteering website to be run by the university, spanning several departments. It's at the early stages at the moment but it's great to see the university engaging with the importance of volunteer work for students and the local community.

Martin, James and I, along with three JCR presidents, went to meet with the Merton Street colleges' domestic bursars to discuss post-exam trashing. This was very friendly and will hopefully lead to some positive changes.

I met with Adam from Oxhub and Will from CSV (Community Service Volunteers) to discuss how we could effectively work together. We're going to try to get a community committee together to promote volunteering and we're going on a road trip on the dreaded X5 to see how it's done in the other place.

I met with Marie Wright from Make a Difference to discuss e-mentoring schemes and the OxDox Film Festival.

I met with the KEEN president Katie about volunteer recruitment.

On Monday of 8th I visited the ACE Centre for children with complex disabilities, which is situated in Headington. The work they're doing with I.T is phenomenal and, having had a go myself(!), making an incredible difference to the lives of children and young people with disabilities. I'm hoping to get lots of student volunteers (particularly physicists and computer scientists) in to help in Hilary term.

In 8th week I've also got a meeting with the Oxford Inspires group about White Night in December.

I'm in talks with The Gatehouse about helping out with the redecoration project coming up next month.

RAG

'In the Pink' turned into a very successful evening, with performances from The Belles and slam poet Sian Robins-Grace. Special thanks go to Sarahjane for preparing so much wonderful food, and to Caroline for jumping through all of Wadham's catering hoops. This is an annual event to raise money for and awareness of Breast Cancer.

We're currently working on RAG Christmas cards which will be sold throughout 7th and 8th week. The two designs look amazing, they're cheaper than most shop cards and 100% of profit goes to charity (compared to as little as 3% in high street shops). Please buy them and promote them in your college.

RAG pants orders are away and will hopefully be back in time for the end of term.

RAG spent two full days on Cornmarket selling poppies for The British Legion. We sold 8 boxes (2000!!!) and collected 7 very full collection tins. We'll find out our total at the end of this week

Environment

Daniel Lowe (from the E&E Committee) attended the university's Environment Panel meeting, in which we spoke about non-sustainable fish in colleges, ways of reducing water consumption in the science labs and student cycling.

Dave Green

OUSU Business Manager

Hi all,

Sorry if this report is a bit dull, but unfortunately that's the world of OUSU Business...I'll go through the completed projects first, then take you through some of the new and ongoing ones.

Summer Publications and Projects

Summary

Summer publications generally proceeded smoothly from a sales perspective, although some difficulties were experienced. In particular, given that these were the first projects I was called upon to manage, I would have appreciated more input and guidance from my predecessor: for example, advice on how best to manage the chasing of advertising copy after sales had been made would have been most useful (my sole advice for my year as Business Manager having consisted of the sentence "just start selling the f**k out of stuff"). Nevertheless, we hit (or were close to hitting) both financial targets and deadlines on the Oxford Handbook, Oxford and Cambridge Careers Handbook (OCCH) and the Freshers' and Graduate Guide. On Freshers' Fair we sold more stalls than last year, but failed to hit our financial target (or last year's total) due to our failure to find a replacement for Deutsche Bank as the Fair's main sponsor. The Term Planner unfortunately had to be cancelled: also, cap and gown sales were considerably lower than in previous years.

The Freshers' and Graduate Guide

This was the first project that I managed. As such, there was a degree of "bedding in": I was in handover meetings for a considerable portion of time; ABMs did not arrive until 25th June (Monday 9th Week of Trinity); and our sales period was only 3 weeks long. Nevertheless, I was reasonably happy with the progress made on this project.

We made approx. £16,500 from the Guide, a slight improvement on last year. However, this was unfortunately still slightly below target. Improving our position in the annual negotiation with the Oxford Union Society made a positive (though time consuming) contribution to this, as it did to the

Oxford Handbook: in particular, because the price paid now better reflects the costs accruing to us from carrying their insert.

There were a few problems. I had difficulties, at least initially, in effectively managing the ABMs at the same time as I was essentially learning my job as I went along: this improved as the summer developed, but as the first project the Freshers' and Graduate Guide took the brunt of this. In addition, notional and actual deadlines for the completion of this project were not adequately communicated to me and the rest of the business team: hence, whilst we did ultimately extend our sales deadline, had we known initially that this would be possible we could have made more sales. In addition, there were problems in chasing advertising copy – a common theme throughout my time as BM so far. However, each of these problems was relatively minor.

The Freshers' and Graduate Guide made, in my opinion, a positive contribution to OUSU's institutional objectives: it was extremely well designed, contained useful content, and showed off OUSU's strengths well. A stronger contribution could have been made had we been able to deliver a copy to every single fresher within a short time of exam results coming out: that we were not able to do this does not reflect badly on anyone in OUSU or OSSSL, but on the intransigence of college secretaries and the Byzantine bureaucratic structures of data collection and use within the university and the colleges. To this end, I made a complaint to the Junior Proctor about our general difficulties in completing this project (which had additional implications for cap and gown sales – see below).

The Oxford Handbook

The Oxford Handbook also proceeded on a generally smooth trajectory: however, considering the use of colour for the first time in this publication, expectations were not matched (either in advertising sales or in design quality).

The Oxford Handbook made approx. £16,109: more than last year, but less than the increase in its costs due to the introduction of colour. It also narrowly missed its target.

The managerial side of selling the Handbook went very smoothly: however, given that the Handbook sales period overlaps with both the Freshers' and Graduate Guide and the OCCH, we often found our staffing resources stretched. This resulted in fewer contacts and follow-ups being made that I would have preferred, and likely resulted in fewer sales. In addition, the chasing of advertising copy was a non-trivial problem, coming as it did at the same time as the OCCH sales and copy deadlines were upon us: however, copy was ultimately delivered with few serious impacts on this or other projects.

Oxford and Cambridge Careers Handbook (OCCH)

The OCCH was the major project of the summer for me and for the business team, as befits its position as our most lucrative summer project. A number of relatively serious problems were encountered here: however, they did not impede the ultimate progression of the project, and our best OCCH yet is to be delivered to OUSU next week.

The OCCH made £125,500 in sales this summer (i.e. £62,750 after the split with Cambridge), its best year yet. This is a considerable improvement on last year's total of approx. £93,000.

So far as sales went, management proceeded generally smoothly. However, considerable problems arose with the interaction between the business team and the publication editors, given the nature of advertising content in this publication. Also, ABMs were not able to stay beyond 8 weeks of employment: at a crucial time for the OCCH, we were left with no ABMs and little means of finding new ones. Hence, the end of the sales process was testing: also, the chasing process was fraught with difficulties, and resulted (at one point) in considerable hostility between business and publications teams. I have accepted my personal responsibility for part of this: however, I am of the strong belief that better initial deployment of ABMs could have improved this matter considerably (a point I will return to in recommendations). However, we were able to finish the publication only one week over deadline and we were able to meet our printing slot: a considerable achievement, in my view, given the problems towards the end of the period. The OCCH has now been delivered, to widespread critical and popular acclaim.

Freshers' Fair

The Fair was conducted very well, and was managed in an even more efficient and thorough manner than in previous years (to the extent that this was remarked upon by returning stallholders and guests). The majority of the thanks for the overall management of the fair must, of course, go to Sam McGeever as Fair Manager, to Assistant Fair Manager Justine Ramsden, and to Senior Stewards Nick Edwards, Rose Goddard and Tom Rackham: in addition, their contribution to our commercial successes cannot be underestimated, and they have earned my heartfelt thanks.

Counting society stall payments and payments by disaffiliates to attend the Fair, the Fair brought in approx. £69,000: however, taking into account only commercial sales, we made between £5,000 and £8,000 less than last year's total (despite selling more stalls in the commercial tent). Our inability to find a replacement for Deutsche Bank as main sponsors (£11,000) is the obvious culprit for this shortfall: however, since our target for all income from the Fair was £65,000, we were still over target. Nevertheless, we should have been able to meet this target without the approx. £15,000 income from disaffiliates and society desk sales, and so we must count the Fair as having failed to meet expectations.

A small amount of money (amounting to less than £300) will be retained in the form of lost deposits: at the suggestion of the Fair Manager and with the agreement of me, the VP (Finance) and the President, this will be donated to RAG.

Sales for the Freshers' Fair were relatively easy to make, since demand for Freshers' Fairs is generally high and increasing throughout the SU sector: however, managing the delivery of these sales into a functioning commercial area which meets client expectations is extremely hard. In this as in other projects, I suffered from a lack of guidance from my predecessor, and no doubt wasted a considerable portion of time creating solutions to problems which must have existed before, and where notice of previous solutions would have helped considerably. Nevertheless, thanks to considerable efforts on my part and the parts of Sam and his team, we were able to create a successful fair that met with satisfaction from most clients (according to feedback forms which I distributed on the last day of the Fair). However, the effort that this required meant that a number of other projects did not have proper attention paid to them, which is a serious concern.

I believe that the atmosphere of the commercial area of the Fair, as well as the range and quality of stallholders present, made a contribution to the overall impression that the Fair was conducted to OUSU's credit in the eyes of the vast majority of attendees.

Term Planner

This project is now not going ahead: the fact that its main sales period coincided with the time-critical management period for the Freshers' Fair, the chasing period for the Oxford Handbook and the OCCH, and with the period in which cap and gown sales were requiring attention meant that I was unable to devote more than a small amount of time to the project. A dedicated ABM or other staff member doing telesales could have made this project work: however, as it was, I feel that my decision to neglect this project was justified, given that other projects were of more financial and institutional importance to OUSU and OSSL. As it is, four clients will have to be advised of the fact that they will not be included in this publication, losing OSSL approximately £2,000 of income: however, we were unable to break even on the project, and to bring it to fruition in a timeframe that would have made it a useful tool for students.

Cap and Gown

The Cap and Gown project was a major disappointment this year. I am willing to accept the fact that part of its failure is my fault: I disregarded this project in order to concentrate on other projects, and whilst to an extent this was a wise decision given that we were running beyond capacity and were overstretched, there is an extent to which I ought to have prioritized it more. However this led more to after-sales problems: problems in sales, in my view, are largely down to a direct impediment to sale in the form of a code required on our website, as well as the success of Shepherd and Woodward in getting their advertising material into every college freshers' pack (which were distributed ahead of ours) and the general tightening of competition in the market. It is my strong recommendation that

Cap and Gown sales next year be done simply in order to clear our existing stock, and that we wind up the Cap and Gown project as soon as is practicable.

Given that I placed an order for 600 extra gowns, we just about broke even: this is a considerable failure in terms of our financial targets, since we should have made in excess of £10,000. However, excess stock from this year can be sold next year, when I recommend that no new gowns be purchased.

This project was neglected over the summer, which led to major problems. Part of the reason for this is that when publications and the Freshers' Fair are being prepared there is an editorial team or Fair Manager to answer to, and who gets annoyed when things are not actioned within an agreed time frame: this project, however, has no such automatic stabilizer. Nevertheless, Cap and Gown sales should have occupied more of my time over the summer, and I apologize to the Board for the fact that it did not.

Sales-period problems (which impacted on sales) include the fact that the sales system on the website was not ready early enough, a problem which was largely produced by previously unforeseen problems in setting up the World Pay payment engine: I accept that our web developer made great efforts to do this, and believe that very little could have helped this. However, I believe that the biggest impediment to sale was the requirement on the internet order form to input a code which could only be found at the bottom of page 10 of the Freshers' and Graduate Guide: this was not a decision which I took, and indeed only came to my attention when complaints from freshers and from Oxford Limited began to come in by phone. I believe that this was a major error: both in its substance, and in the fact that a decision with commercial implications was taken without my knowledge or consultation. I would have counselled very strongly against this decision had it been brought to me before being taken.

After-sales problems were also considerable: I accept responsibility for the large problems in getting ties and ribbons arranged (since I informed Griff to advertise the offer as Cap, Gown and Tie/Ribbon on the website, but then failed to order them from our supplier). There were also problems arising from the fact that the website form did not ask for sizes from purchasers, for which I should accept at least partial blame.

I do not believe that any of the managerial problems arising from this project have cast OUSU in a negative light amongst students: however, it is certainly the case that had more gowns been sold to freshers, more students would have associated OUSU with a popular, visible and tangible service. To this extent, Cap and Gown sales were an institutional failure.

Ongoing Projects: ZOO and OxStu

Our ZOO nights in Freshers' Week worked well: however, they are experiencing problems now that we have moved into term. The Oxford Student is proceeding fairly well: however, time spent tracking bookings and chasing copy could be better spent increasing overall sales.

ZOO

Surprisingly, after a good first four nights in Freshers' Week, from Friday of 0th week ZOO initially failed to meet entrance targets. In part, this is due to the difficulties in balancing promotional work for ZOO with the other duties that Rich and I have: however, even the introduction of a promotional and postering team have not improved matters. Monday night at Carling Academy failed to take off, and was dropped by mutual agreement of us and the venue. Fresh (our Friday night at Bar Risa) has since taken off nicely, and is rapidly becoming our signature night: similarly, ZOO Na Na at Po Na Na (Thursday) has been consistently successful. Consistently problematic has been Wednesday at Park End, where renewed competition and a lengthy and intrusive refurbishment of the venue have hit us hard. Also, a rebranding of the club will pose us additional problems once the refurbishment is complete.

Considerable difficulties are experienced in balancing ZOO duties with the management of our other media, to the extent that this can only currently be achieved by Rich and I working well over our contracted hours. This will likely improve if the new promotional team reforms are successful, and if night managers are found for each night: however, there is still a time cost in administering this system

(i.e. in allocating promotional staff; tracking hours worked; deciding promotional strategy etc). Hence, the problems of ZOO management will not totally disappear. As it is, we are currently severely overstretched even when attempting to provide three (rather than the initial four) nights.

Currently, with the exception of Carling Academy each night has been attended by a non-embarrassing number of people: to this extent, those who did attend had fun, and so will hopefully associate their positive experience with OUSU (given that ZOO promotional material now brands OUSU far more prominently than in the past). However, we need to arrest the decline in ZOO if we do not want to put this at risk.

OxStu

Oxford Student ads have worked very well this term, and I am happy that we have hit our rough target for the term (meaning that there is less pressure to sell in the relatively leaner terms of Hilary and Trinity). Problems were experienced initially in tracking advertising bookings: better ad-hoc systems to solve this have been implemented, pending a wholesale review of our systems and processes over the Christmas Vacation.

Forum and Bang!

The Oxford Forum has been delayed until the beginning of Hilary, due to printing time constraints: I am pleased that this will give me more time to sell its advertising intensively, since converting interest into sales on this particular project was harder than first anticipated (especially since there was no advertising at all in the Trinity 2007 edition). Bang! Has been a great success, and I am confident that advertising for the Hilary edition will be easily found (given that Bang! Came to OSSL with a strong advertising base when we took it on).

OxbridgeCareers.com

This was the pet project of my predecessor, and has been a nightmare for all of us who have had to pick up where he left off. First, considerable problems have occurred in terms of relations between us and Cambridge (with whom we are collaborating on the project); secondly, serious concerns have been raised about the credentials of the contractor with whom the project rests. Finally, questions exist as to whether the initial specifications and plan for this project were thought through enough. Nevertheless, the project will go live in the next couple of weeks, and we shall see how much success we are able to garner – given that a considerable portion of my time has been taken up this term getting up to speed on this project and salvaging it from disaster, it is my ardent wish that it will be extremely successful.

Kieran Hutchinson-Dean	Common Room Support
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It is traditional for outgoing OUSU sabbatical officers to make lengthy reports about their experiences with sweeping recommendations for the future, most of which are then ignored. Despite this, as an out-going member of the part-time executive, I am doing a written report to Council with recommendations for the future. They are particularly aimed at my successor, the current sabbaticals and the sabbatical – elects.

The word that probably best describes my involvement with OUSU is frustration. I am disappointed at the impact I have made in the position; some of which has been my fault, some of which was caused by institutional problems within OUSU. Yet making this position work is essential if OUSU is to function. It is because I want to see OUSU work and believe that I have learnt lessons from my experiences that I offer these recommendations. I hope they are accepted in the spirit that they are intended.

Recommendations:

1. Handover. Getting this right is vital. When people are newly elected it is vital to make them feel part of the team. This is particularly important for the CRSO because they are the conduit between OUSU and CRs and must work effectively with all the sabbaticals. As the first holder of this post I had no guidance about what I should do. I recommend the CRSO sit down with ALL the sabbaticals upon taking office to establish a way of working effectively, ensuring all information is communicated to CRs. One project that didn't come to fruition was an attempt to map all interaction between OUSU and CRs, to test strengths and weaknesses. However this needs all members of Exec to record their interactions with CRs. This way the CRSO can see where OUSU is failing and things can be improved.

2. Reps Committee. One of the biggest tasks of the CRSO is meeting with OUSU Reps. This is something I did in my first two terms in office, after an absence of the meetings for over a year. However attendance was dismal – despite changing venues, meeting times, holding a drinks event etc. only a handful of OUSU Reps attended. There is more that could be done by the CRSO. Hold a big drinks event with CR Presidents and OUSU Reps. Get Sabs to attend Reps Comm to create more of a reason to attend. Yet we need to rethink what the role of the OUSU Rep is, and the role of Reps Comm. What should be discussed there? What would get OUSU Reps attending? It seems in most CRs the President deals with all OUSU-related stuff. Where do the lines of responsibility divide? Also, there are too many CRs where OUSU Reps do not attend Council. There is little the CRSO can do about this – but CRs are missing out on representation without it. This is not something OUSU or the CRSO can sort out, it needs input from CRs. I recommend the CRSO meets with CR Presidents and OUSU Reps to discuss these problems and try to work out a way forward.

3. Communication with CR Presidents. Some CR Presidents have commented they did not even know the CRSO position existed. This is understandable because the CRSO deals only with OUSU Reps. However, there should be discussion about how to improve communication channels here. As CRSO I was always conscious of the autonomy of Pres Comm, however maybe it would be useful if the CRSO was on this mailing list or went to Pres Comm to discuss current events. This is something I think CR Presidents need to discuss.

4. Database. This was discussed in the hustings for my position in 5th Week. One of the greatest difficulties I found was having a comprehensive up-to-date list of OUSU Reps. With CRs holding elections at different times of the year it was never clear when one OUSU Rep replaced another. I recommend CRs are asked when they hold OUSU Rep elections so that the CRSO knows when a new one is elected. On the wider issue there may be a case for an IT solution – an online database that can be updated by CR Presidents/Officers.

5. Guide to OUSU. When elected OUSU Reps should meet with the CRSO and/or President and be given a pack of info about what OUSU does and how it works. This was something that I hoped to do over the summer but never had time to do. However the CRSO is unlikely to have the time to do this alone. I recommend the CRSO sit down with the rest of the Executive and work out how this can be achieved. It is important OUSU Reps feel part of the OUSU team and I think the CRSO should meet OUSU Reps when they are elected. This personal contact may encourage more participation. This is why the information highlighted in 4 is so important.

OUSU is often criticised and rightly so, its performance could be improved in many ways. However it cannot force OUSU Reps to engage. These recommendations are designed to make this as easy as possible. However CRs need to recognise that if their OUSU Reps are not involved the CR lacks representation, and there is only so much that OUSU and the CRSO can do to resolve that.

I am happy to meet with people to discuss these recommendations, and my experiences, further. I hope they will allow people to learn from the mistakes I made and the difficulties I faced.