

Pro-Vice-Chancellor's Update

Trinity term 2015

Government, both past and present, has been a constant theme this term. Early May saw the drama of election night, whose outcome was only accurately predicted by the exit poll (with two Oxford academics – Dr Stephen Fisher of the Department of Sociology and Jon Mellor of Nuffield College – helping develop the poll's statistical model). This month sees the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, the 'Great Charter' of 1215 that has come to symbolise the rule of law and freedom, with celebrations taking place at the Bodleian and across the country. And the next few months will see the completion of a stunning cylindrical building on the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter to house the Blavatnik School of Government, a building which expresses in architectural form some of the key principles of good government – openness, communication and transparency.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to dedicate this term's edition of the newsletter to government and the various ways in which the External Affairs Portfolio has been helping support initiatives in this area. But before we look at some of the projects with which Alumni Relations, the Development Office and Public Affairs have been involved, I thought I would take a moment to consider the post-election landscape and what it means for higher education and for Oxford.

In terms of undergraduate tuition fees, the only public commitment of the new government is to ensure the 'continuing success and stability' of the current system, and a reiteration of the promise to abolish the student number cap. On postgraduate funding, they stay committed to a postgraduate loan scheme. In terms of research funding, there has been a notable reluctance to commit publicly to a continuation of the ring-fence of the last government – they promise only to follow the Nurse Review in ensuring that public money is used in 'the best possible way'. There are plenty of commitments to specific areas of research – cancer and dementia in particular – and to investing in research hubs, such as the Northern Powerhouse. But, for a government that is committed to making further budget cuts of £30 billion, this has to be a concern. For this reason, we will be attempting to bend all the ears we can on the importance to the longer-term interests of the UK economy of supporting and protecting a vibrant and healthy research programme.



There are other major issues of course. The demonstrable benefits of EU membership for university research funding will certainly be an argument deployed by the HE sector in the referendum campaign, when it comes. There are the thorny issues of anti-terrorism legislation and implications for speakers on university campuses, as well as the continued battle to have overseas students removed from the immigration cap. Then there are commitments to providing more data to potential students; requirements to make more rigorous immigration checks; important personnel commitments around gender equality; and reforms to teacher training.

So the coming months will no doubt prove an interesting and exercising time for External Affairs and for the wider University. And when our new Vice-Chancellor arrives in January, she can be certain not only of a very warm welcome but also a very full in-tray.

With all good wishes for a relaxing summer break,
Nick Rawlins

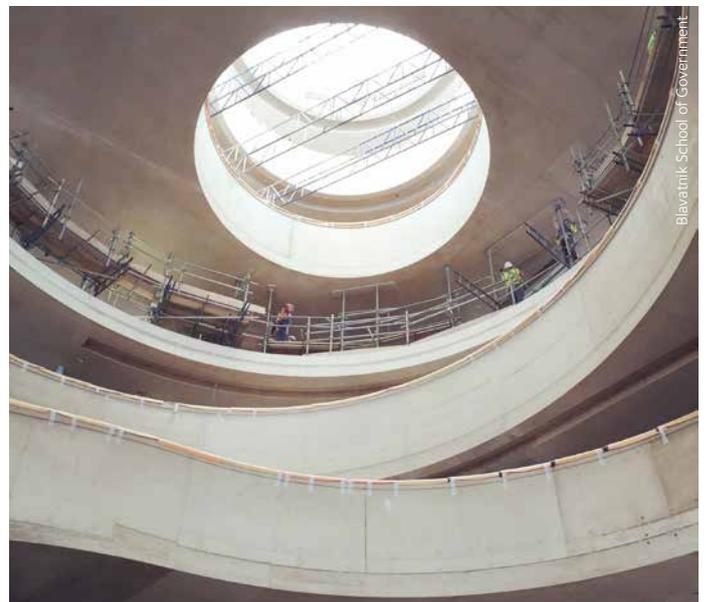


A new building for the Blavatnik

It is almost three years since the Blavatnik School of Government opened its doors to the first cohort of students undertaking a Master of Public Policy (MPP), its flagship programme which features lectures and seminars by leading academics, together with workshops and masterclasses taught by political, civic and business leaders. Since then the School has also created a DPhil programme and a range of short courses for senior policymakers and professionals. Established through a donation of £75m from businessman Leonard Blavatnik, the School is educating the next generation of leaders for 'a world better led, a world better served, a world better governed'. Donors are also supporting the School through the provision of scholarships to help ensure that students of the highest calibre from across the world can take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the School.

From late autumn 2015 the School will relocate to a magnificent new building on the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. Designed by renowned architects Herzog & de Meuron, the facility is designed to promote interaction and collaboration: a large open forum at the heart of the building provides space for exhibitions, presentations and

informal discussions, while a flexible teaching space can be used either as a large lecture room or as four separate spaces for seminars and meetings. You can find out more at www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/about/new-building.





Alumni events explore the political arena

Reform of the EU and the experience of coalition government in the UK will be among the talks on offer at the *Meeting Minds: Alumni Weekend in Oxford* in September. The major annual gathering of alumni, which takes place from 18 to 20 September, includes a keynote lecture by the Chancellor, Lord Patten of Barnes, on the troubled relationship between politics and identity, and an insight into how Oxford Analytica prepares its daily brief of geopolitical and macroeconomic events. Details of the programme are at www.alumniweekend.ox.ac.uk.

The conflict in Ukraine was one of the topics discussed during the Alumni Weekend in Europe, which took place in Vienna in April. In a session chaired by Lord Patten, the panellists discussed Ukraine's regional diversity, its many economic and linguistic ties with Russia, the history of negotiations with the EU, and the complexity of the conflict. Solutions mooted included decentralisation in Ukraine and scholarships to support young Ukrainians as they set about rebuilding their country. You can read a review of the weekend at www.oxfordtoday.ox.ac.uk/features/other-dreaming-spires-no-not-cambridge and listen to an interview with BBC journalist and alumna Bethany Bell at <http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/foreign-correspondent-bethany-bell-keble-1987>.

Electoral coverage

During the week of 3–9 May, the digital communications team in Public Affairs ran a special general election 'takeover' on the University homepage and Twitter channel, highlighting the range of blogs, research and insight being generated by Oxford academics in relation to the election. The material included the Oxford Internet Institute's election night number-crunching, the TheySay digital sentiment analysis tool, and a range of blogs and podcasts, while election day saw a series of tweets using the trending #ge2015 hashtag to showcase the University's contribution to the overall election conversation.

Celebrating Magna Carta

15 June 2015 marked the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta – the 'Great Charter' agreed between King John and his barons, which regulated the feudal customs of the kingdom. As part of the celebrations, the Bodleian is displaying three of its four copies of the charter in the Weston Library: the 'Gloucester Charter' forms the centrepiece of the *Marks of Genius* exhibition in the ST Lee Gallery, which runs until 20 September, while two other copies of the charter, together with a variety of related documents from the Libraries' collections, feature in the *Magna Carta 800* display until 28 June.

Issued to the county of Gloucestershire in 1217, the Gloucester Charter is one of the 17 surviving 'engrossments' or exemplifications of the text, which were officially issued to English counties by the royal chancery and revised according to the political priorities of the time. Together with the other 1217 charters, it was produced by the guardians of the 10-year-old King Henry III to stabilise his reign, and removed clauses from the original charter that had greatly reduced the power of the king. It was bequeathed to the Bodleian by Richard Furney (1694–1753) and is considered the finest of the four copies of the document held by the Bodleian.

The *Magna Carta 800* display is in the public exhibition space of Blackwell Hall, the new entrance hall of the Weston Library named in honour of Julian Blackwell, the President of Blackwell UK Ltd, who donated £5 million towards the building work. The Weston Library, which opened to the public on 21 March, honours the £25 million donation given by the Garfield Weston Foundation towards the transformation of the New Bodleian into an advanced special collections library and cultural centre.



Above: Some of Oxford's coverage during election week.