

OXFORD

MAGAZINE

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SUDDENLY, on the night of Friday 13th November, Paris acquired a double and awesome significance for us all. Up to that evening Paris, the city of the enlightenment, stood for the hopes and fears surrounding the U.N. Climate Change conference due to start on 30th November. Some 130 World Leaders, including Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping, and quite possibly the Pope, were expected to attend. 196 countries were to be represented. For many, especially the scientific community, this meeting represents the point of no return: decisions made there will determine whether we manage or fail to limit the future average temperature rise to a tolerable 2°C, beyond which untold dangers lie. Unprecedented security arrangements were to be put in place, including the re-establishment of border controls. But after 13/11 Paris symbolises something new; a form of ruthless terrorism which threatens everyday life in a pervasive and unavoidable way, not least in attitudes to freedom of expression and surveillance. President Hollande banned forthwith the climate change march that would have taken place in Paris on the day before the conference.

Who can tell how the 13/11 Paris bombings and shootings will affect the process and consequences of the climate conference? Will there be a new sense of solidarity and urgency among the leaders at the meeting? Will the urgency of tackling terrorism be a distraction when they would otherwise have been concentrating on the even more serious threat to civilisation and humanity posed by climate change? How fully will they hear and heed what the science unambiguously tells us? Will enlightenment prevail?

*“It is a remarkable testament to humanity’s narcissism that we know the number of books in the US Library of Congress on 1 February 2011 was 22,194,656, but cannot tell you—to within an order-of-magnitude—how many distinct species of plants and animals we share our world with”**

In his recent survey Bob May reports estimates of the total number of species as ranging from 3 to 100 million and concludes that: “All in all, my optimistic guess would be around a century to complete our assessment of the diversity of life on earth”. He ends by saying:

“We increasingly recognise that such knowledge is important for full understanding of the ecological and evolutionary processes which created, and which are struggling to maintain, the diverse biological riches we are heir to. Such biodiversity is much more than beauty and wonder”.

In the same survey May records that the number of species at present going extinct is estimated to be between 100 and 10,000 times higher than the average extinction rate seen over the half-billion-year sweep of the fossil record. Just last week the news media announced that the Northern White Rhino had become extinct: the death of one individual in San Diego Zoo meant that only three remained alive world-wide and they are all too old to breed. We face what has been described as Earth’s “sixth mass extinction”**. The “big five”—the first 443 million years ago, the last 65 million—caused the loss of between 75% and 96% of species existing at the time. CO₂ and associated temperature changes are thought to have been involved as causes in all of them. On those occasions temperature changed due to natural

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...and much more

(geological and cosmic) events: now mankind is reproducing the effect all on its own.

As members of the public we may worry that our grandchildren may never see a live tiger. Scientists are designing strategies for “conservation”: conservation areas, egg and seed banks, refuges in zoos and so on. Speculators are investing money on the most likely winners. There is much talk about depletion of resources and habitats due to farming, deforestation and invasive species including new pathogens, not to mention overpopulation by *Homo sapiens* and wars. In present circumstances how, rationally, do we decide which species to protect? Biologists will argue for the maintenance of genetic diversity or a balanced ecosystem: the public would probably opt for pandas or African safari parks. But all of this is missing the point: increasingly the single dominant cause of the destruction of Nature has been, and will overwhelmingly be, climate change. The sci-

tific predictions have been right so far: mass extinction is an inevitable prospect if Paris and its immediate follow-up fail.

We humans are just one of the 703 species and sub-species of primates. Half of these species are currently on the endangered list. With climate change heading the way it is at present we will be joining the list along with all the other creations—many still unrecognised and unrecorded—of the evolutionary process, miraculous and inviolable as it should seem to us who now control it. Bob May refers to the “beauty and wonder” of the natural world; perhaps that is what it should all be about.

T.J.H

* May, R.M. (2011) Why Worry about How Many Species and Their Loss? *PLoS Biol*, 9(8):e1001130.

** Barnosky, A.D. et al (2011) Has the Earth’s sixth mass extinction already arrived? *Nature*, 471: 51-57.

The next issue of Oxford Magazine will appear in noughth week

The *Oxford Magazine* is edited by

Tim Horder

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Climate change and the Syrian civil war

The following extracts are taken from a recent peer-reviewed scientific paper.¹ The authors are from the University of California (Santa Barbara) and Columbia University—eds.

"Beginning in the winter of 2006/2007, Syria and the greater Fertile Crescent (FC), where agriculture and animal herding began some 12,000 years ago, experienced the worst 3-year drought in the instrumental record. The drought exacerbated existing water and agricultural insecurity and caused massive agricultural failures and livestock mortality.... Government agricultural policy is prominent among the many factors that shaped Syria's vulnerability to drought.... One critical consequence of these unsustainable policies is the decline of groundwater..."

In fact, the region has been in moderate to severe drought from 1998 through 2009, with 7 of 11 years receiving rainfall below the 1901–2008 normal. It is notable that three of the four most severe multiyear droughts have occurred in the last 25 years, the period during which external anthropogenic forcing has seen its largest increase.

The most significant consequence was the migration of as many as 1.5 million people from rural farming areas to the peripheries of urban centers... Estimates of the number of people internally displaced by the drought are as high as 1.5 million.... Most migrated to the peripheries of Syria's cities, already burdened by strong population growth (~2.5% per year) and the influx of an estimated 1.2–1.5 million Iraqi refugees between 2003 and 2007, many of whom arrived toward the tail end of this time frame at the beginning of the drought...

By 2010, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Iraqi refugees made up roughly 20% of Syria's urban population. The total urban population of Syria in 2002 was 8.9 million but, by the end of 2010, had grown to 13.8 million, a more than 50% increase in only 8 years, a far greater rate than for the Syrian population as a whole.... Thus, the migration in response to the severe and prolonged drought exacerbated a number of the factors often cited as contributing to the unrest, which include unemployment, corruption, and rampant inequality...

Our thesis that drought contributed to the conflict in Syria draws support from recent literature establishing a statistical link between climate and conflict^{2,3,4}... An abundance of history books on the subject tell us that civil unrest can never be said to have a simple or unique cause... This recent drought was likely made worse by human-induced climate change, and such persistent, deep droughts are projected to become more commonplace in a warming world."

¹ Kelley, C.P., Mohtadi, S., Cane, M.A., Seager, R. and Kushnir, Y. (2015) Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought. *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA*, 112 (11): 3241–3246

² Goldstone, J. (2002) Population and security: How demographic change can lead to violent conflict. *J Int Aff.* 56(1):3–22

³ Hsiang, S.M., Burke, M. and Miguel, E. (2013) Quantifying the influence of climate on human conflict. *Science*, 341(6151):1235367

⁴ Solow, A.R. (2013) Global warming: A call for peace on climate and conflict. *Nature*, 497(7448):179–180

How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

Questions and replies

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

Postal votes

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present ("on the floor") at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

Flysheets

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>
Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation.

Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk).

Climate Change: a student's perspective

NICK HARVEY*

CLIMATE change is no longer an issue for the future, its effects are being felt right now. Decreasing rainfall in places such as Zimbabwe, increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and changes in the timing of the seasons, have all been attributed to our warming climate and are happening here and now. Arguably, the great climate migration has already begun, with life in many island nations on the brink of becoming untenable. On Tuvalu, saltwater intrusion has made farming difficult, the rains that provide drinking water are becoming unreliable and by the end of the century all the land of the nation could be under water. Just last year, a court ruling in New Zealand granted residency to a family from Tuvalu, with part of their lawyers' argument being that climate change had made their life on the islands too difficult. There is also a plan underway to relocate thousands of indigenous Guna people from their islands in the Caribbean Sea to the Panamanian mainland as rising sea levels and the increasing frequency of storms flood settlements and farmland.

Whilst the effects of global warming are being felt now, a changing climate is undoubtedly an intergenerational problem. My generation and every future generation will have to cope with and adapt to a world very different to the one that the baby-boomers have known. Every generation has its defining paradigms. For those born at the start of the 20th century it was the end of colonialism and the rise of fascism. For the next generation it was the nuclear age and the cold war. What lens will people view my generation through? Some might argue it will be the rise of Islamist terrorism or the declining power of the West relative to the new superpowers. These are undeniably very important to modern global society. However, in my view the theme that will colour history's picture of my generation is climate change and the effects it will have on people worldwide.

So if this is a process that will have severe and global impact during my lifetime, why is there a general perception that this generation of young people doesn't care? Generally, at least in my experience, there is an almost comprehensive acceptance that climate change is happening and is caused by human activity. This isn't where the problem lies. The problem lies in translating this acceptance into action. A 2012 Carbon Trust survey of British 18-25 year olds found that only around half stated that they were concerned about climate change and only 64% said that their generation was more concerned about climate change than their parents or grandparents. There are several reasons why, even though young people know the risks, not enough of us are taking obvious action.

The first of these reasons isn't restricted to my generation, it is a mind-set that I'm sure most people go through in their youth. This is the 'You Only Live Once' attitude. Caring about and acting on an issue as nebulous as climate change takes effort. Often there is a perception that the actions you can take to help will have a negative impact on your enjoyment and quality of life. Becom-

ing vegetarian, avoiding long-haul flights and going on protests, all fall into this category. However, many people are now beginning to see there is actually much to be gained personally by taking action, from saving money and improving health to finding new friends in your community. It can be easy though to justify your carbon footprint by saying that you're only on this Earth for a finite time so you have the right to enjoy it all while you're young and you can. The justification becomes easier if you can think of the catastrophes that will arise as being restricted to the future and affecting people not yet born who we don't know. What needs to be communicated to young people is the urgency and breadth of the problem. It will affect us all personally in our lifetimes. If we were horrified by the scenes of dead refugees washing up on the shores of Europe this summer, then what is to come is unimaginable.

Secondly, there is the sense of economic and political disenfranchisement that is pervasive in my generation, not only in the UK but across Europe. Arguably, one of the most effective actions the public can take to tackle social and environmental issues in a market economy is to exercise their power as consumers. Students have much less weight to throw around in this arena than older members of society. 'Ethically sourced' products, whether they are eco-labelled, organic or locally produced, often come with a premium price tag. An average student saves money wherever they can, so the amount of economic power we have is severely restricted. We also struggle to get our voice heard politically, although this is probably a more easily-tackled problem. According to the Intergenerational Foundation, in the 2015 general election the turnout of 18-24 year olds was around 45%. This is shockingly low compared to the national average of 65%. Young people are often told that we are apathetic and our voices can't be heard. This sets up a vicious cycle where we think that we aren't listened to so perceive little point in going to the ballot box. Even if concern over climate change is more prevalent among my generation than older ones, this is unlikely to translate into manifesto pledges if politicians know few young people actually vote. If we have no economic or political routes to express our concerns, then what option do we have? After all, if a student changed their mind overnight and woke up tomorrow suddenly with an overwhelming urge to act on climate change, what could they do to help the cause? Become vegetarian? Turn off their lights? Go on a protest once a year? Yes, action on a personal level is important, but it can feel trivial in terms of the drastic results we so desperately need now.

Finally, the list of problems that we have to tackle as a global society is extensive. Poverty, inequality, war, human rights abuses and biodiversity loss may all take precedence above climate change in people's minds. No one can hope to take the time to take action on all of these. We are a social species, so naturally humans are more receptive to problems that concern other humans. A changing climate has long term and diverse effects that

are difficult to ascribe causation to. This evokes less of an emotional response than harrowing pictures of war and famine. To get young people to engage with global warming, it has to be demonstrated that no matter what your priorities are, climate change will have an effect on them. Water shortages will spark wars, famines will worsen poverty and shifts in climate will affect biodiversity.

The fact that climate change has to be taken seriously in every sector of society and is a driver behind many social ills was the theme behind this year's Oxford Climate Forum in November. This was captured in the title '*Climate Connections*'. In light of this, there was a wide range speakers throughout the day, from lawyers working for ClientEarth to veteran Friends of the Earth campaigner, Tony Juniper, to venerated diplomat and academic Sir Crispin Tickell. The conference brought

together this disparate set of people behind a common banner of concern over our warming climate. The hope is that events such as this will help to shift young people from accepting climate change is happening to taking action and speaking up about it because it will affect their generation. In the words of the climate forum committee:

'The forum helped raise awareness about the effects of climate change, that it goes far beyond polar bears or a distant future and it is affecting real people all around the world already. Today's students are the next generation of leaders, so by holding the climate forum and engaging them now we will one day have world leaders who consider climate change and give it the appropriate significance. More broadly, the forum clearly showed students that climate change is a very urgent and cross cutting issue, which will be relevant to whatever sector they go into in the future. Therefore we hope the fight against climate change they began at the forum will continue throughout their lives.'

* On behalf of the Oxford Climate Forum

Climate change is not the most urgent issue facing the world today: which is why the Paris conference matters

MYLES ALLEN

As tens of thousands of diplomats, politicians and activists converge on Paris for the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change next week, the mood could hardly be more different from that in Copenhagen in 2009. Rallies, marches and open-air meetings have been, understandably, banned; those Heads of State that do turn up will no doubt be taking the opportunity to huddle over migration and terrorism rather than ponder the future of the Anthropocene; and the breathless "12 days to Save the Planet" reporting of six years ago seems like a rather embarrassing dream.

Several Oxford academics are contributing to events at the COP, from meetings of investors concerned about 'stranded assets', to a technical briefing on how to measure the impact of different greenhouse gases in 'Intended Nationally Determined Contributions'. And many more of our students are planning to travel to Paris to make their voices heard somehow on (I hope) rather less esoteric topics. Last year I was invited to act as the senior academic member of the Oxford Climate Society, an impressive and entirely self-organising group genuinely committed to achieving change, several of whom will be cycling to Paris this week. I naturally support them in this, although with a plea to make as little extra work as possible for the long-suffering French police.

Their generation, after all, will feel the impacts of climate change much more than mine: have a look at the interactive we developed with the *Guardian* to get a feel for the 2013 projections from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/interactive/2013/sep/27/climate-change-how-hot-lifetime-interactive>. One of the points

we make is how little has really changed since the last IPCC Assessment in 2007. The odds on the highest projections have been revised down slightly, but at the same time the impacts of even rather modest levels of warming are becoming clearer.

2015 is shaping up to break 2014's temperature record by a Usain-Bolt-defying margin, while global temperatures continue to evolve almost exactly as we predicted they would in response to rising greenhouse gases back in the 1990s. Human-induced warming is over 0.9°C already (<http://safecarbon.org>), and if we add in the effect of this year's El Niño event, annual temperatures look set to surpass 1°C for the first time. Even those who used to argue that climate change would be largely benign up to a warming of 2°C now acknowledge that we may have already reached the level at which the costs outweigh any benefits.

So why the apparent lack of urgency about the Paris talks? As the eminent economist Lord Nicholas Stern asked rhetorically in his recent lecture in Oxford and in the title of his latest book: "*Why are we waiting?*" As a non-economist, I can't resist pointing out (and I suspect Nick would agree) that part of the blame lies in traditional economics. I gave a Physics Colloquium earlier this term entitled "*How hot does it get in a world run by economists?*" and the answer was, well, really rather warm if we use conventional "market" rates of discounting to weigh up the benefits of avoided impacts in the future against the costs of avoiding emissions today. Because carbon dioxide accumulates in the climate system, the marginal benefits of one more puff will always exceed the costs on the environment if we discount the future fast enough.

We published a series of papers back in 2009 drawing attention to this cumulative impact: the fact that climate change is a stock, not a flow problem. Risks, in the long term, are determined by the total amount of carbon dioxide we dump in the atmosphere, not the rate of emission in 2020, 2030 or any other year. And as the Nobel prize-winning economist Michal Kalecki put it: “Economics is the science of confusing stocks with flows.” Climate change isn’t the only problem where this matters: as my colleague Cameron Hepburn observes, lots of awkward consequences (not least politicians’ temptation to run up deficits) arise from the fact that we typically measure economic virility in terms of consumption (a flow), not wealth (a stock).

Those 2009 papers appeared too late to have any impact on Copenhagen, but it has been encouraging, over the ensuing years, to see how fast this new way of thinking has been taken up. The latest IPCC reports could not have been clearer: “Cumulative emissions of carbon dioxide largely determine global mean surface warming by the late 21st century and beyond,” and “mitigation pathways that are likely to limit warming to below 2°C relative to preindustrial levels … would require substantial emissions reductions over the next few decades and near zero emissions of CO₂ and other long-lived GHGs by the end of the century.”

For one who, I confess, had grown rather cynical about the willingness or ability of the policy community to respond to evolving science, the response has been impressive. The need for net zero carbon emissions to stabilize climate has been acknowledged by lots of governments, our own Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Amber Rudd, the G7, Mark Carney, Ed Miliband, the list goes on.

This matters, because zero is a nice simple number. The problem with the 2009 way of thinking, “one tonne per person per year in 2050” (or whatever), is that it leaves fossil fuel producing companies, and countries, all planning to be the ones selling those tonnes. The great advantage of zero is there is not much point in arguing over how it is shared out. It makes the long-term climate challenge crystal clear: to stabilise climate, we either have to work out how to compensate for fossil fuel emissions by recapturing carbon dioxide back out of the air and disposing of it permanently, or we need to stop emitting it altogether.

The chances of “net zero” featuring explicitly in the final Paris text are, I gather from the people who read the tea-leaves on such things, rather remote. This is understandable, given the enormity of the implication for some countries that it might mean them having to leave some of their fossil carbon underground. Expect, at best, a vague acknowledgement of a long-term need for decarbonisation. But one thing the IPCC process has taught me is that governments generally understand a lot more than they are prepared to let on, still less acknowledge formally in an internationally-agreed text. So the fact that “net zero” is even under discussion is clear evidence that the vast majority do understand the point and its implications.

Net zero has practical implications far beyond the wording of international agreements. Efforts to stem the flow of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere will be moot unless they are part of a strategy to limit the overall stock of emissions. So what are the actions we can take today that most increase the chances of the generation of decision-makers represented by those students cycling to

Paris achieving net zero when they need to, likely at some point in the second half of this century?

If I have a criticism of Nick Stern’s fine book, it is his emphasis on what can be done immediately. In many ways, that is his point: he is writing about measures we can get on with right away without breaking the budget or compromising on the fight against poverty. It is clearly mad that we, as a nation, waste as much energy heating badly-insulated homes as our entire natural gas imports from Qatar. But you don’t need to be concerned about climate change to realise this makes no sense (unless, it seems, you happen to serve in our current government). But we can’t get emissions to zero with better home insulation.

Conventional emission reduction measures—carbon pricing, subsidies for low-carbon energy, improved vehicle and building efficiency, and such like—may together achieve reductions of 50%, or even 80% depending on your level of optimism. But getting rid of that last 20% will require much more radical measures: capturing carbon dioxide at source and disposing of it underground or in deep ocean trenches, or even recapturing it back out of the air. Bioenergy may have a major role to play here (it certainly does in most scenarios): plants have, after all, a long track record as a carbon capture technology. But competition with food production over land and water resources may be a major limitation.

So, in the end, the next generation is going to have to invent its way out of this problem. There are things we can do today to make the problem they will have to solve easier, harder or plain insurmountable, but in the end, we still have to provide them with the tools and technologies they will need to solve it. Solving climate change does not necessarily require a radical re-invention of the way we live (although that might be a by-product of the solution). Rather, it requires a much more mundane technical reform of the way we use fossil carbon (a worldwide ban being neither practicable nor ethical).

This dawning realisation that the problem is both harder, but also duller, than we thought in 2009, is one of the drivers of the contrast in mood between Paris and Copenhagen. There will be fewer rock-stars in Paris, and that is a promising sign. Rock-stars may help inspire millions to change their behaviour, but we didn’t control cholera in 19th century Britain by changing behaviour (although a discounted cost-benefit analysis in the 1800s might well have suggested that behaviour change was the cheapest way of reducing cholera deaths by 50%, or even 80%, over the next few decades). Cholera was contained by engineers and architects—supported by lawyers and accountants—building sewage systems. We don’t need rock-stars to advise on how to get rid of sewage, and we don’t need them to advise on how to get rid of carbon dioxide either.

Climate change, as an issue, has lost its glamour. And that is a good thing. We needed the rock stars back in the 2000s to get enough people interested to give the politicians the courage to do something about it. But as the first tentative, still inadequate, but at least they are there, steps are taken, the focus moves on to the “how” rather than the “why” of climate change. And that is, inevitably, more mundane. This is not an issue that will be solved by hyperventilating. So, to the students cycling to Paris: make yourselves heard as best you can, keep safe, and come back to your degrees. Your planet needs your hearts and voices, but above all, it needs your brains.

Sustainability within the University

TOM HEEL

The University adopted a carbon management strategy in 2011 which sets out its plan to reduce carbon emissions by 33% by 2020/21 from a 2005/6 baseline¹. This followed a HEFCE directive for universities to set absolute carbon targets and the majority of universities have a carbon reduction target for their direct (space heating, fleet vehicles and electrical power—known as scope 1 and 2) emissions. The target for the sector as a whole is 43% and, as one of the highest carbon emission producers in the sector, Oxford has a considerable role to play. The University matched commitments in the strategy with core funding and currently approximately £2 million is being allocated annually to deliver carbon reduction projects.

Working in partnership with University departments, colleagues in Estates Services and external consultants, the Environmental Sustainability team uses this budget for a wide variety of carbon reduction projects across the University functional estate. Interventions are principally concentrated on the buildings with the highest energy consumption and increasingly projects will focus on environments such as laboratories and IT space. Currently projects to deliver 54% of the initially targeted carbon savings have been implemented or completed.

Although there are a large number of projects in the pipeline the Environmental Sustainability team is always looking for further projects that will deliver energy/carbon and ultimately cost savings, so do contact us if you have an idea for an energy or carbon saving project within your department. The team is also seeking ideas from within the staff and student base this year and is running a Carbon Innovation Programme to mentor project teams with the ultimate goal of funding viable opportunities. In the coming year, an academic post funded by the Department of Engineering and the John Fell Fund will also look at opportunities to realise carbon reduction through applying current academic research, using the University functional estate as a living lab.

As the University has an ambitious capital plan, carbon emission mitigation efforts are not solely concentrated on the existing estate. To improve the sustainability profile of our new and renovated buildings a sustainable buildings philosophy has been developed to complement existing design philosophies focused on other aspects such as mechanical and electrical services. These documents provide design guidance based on prior University project experience and industry best practice. In addition there has been a requirement in place since 2009 that all capital projects with a construction cost over £1m must achieve the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment methodology (BREEAM) standard of 'Excellent'. The BREEAM standard is an holistic sustainability assessment and also requires attention to biodiversity. To further improve the impact of this there is currently a University biodiversity strategy in development which will ensure that interventions are delivered in a cohesive manner.

Though the University does not currently target a reduction in carbon emissions from business travel (scope 3), the newly-developed Transport Strategy was approved by Council in December 2014 and sets a pathway to addressing this, and a wide range of other staff and student transport needs. The University is the largest employer in the county and has a significant stake in reducing the impact of the University on the overall transport network as well as advocating for improvements. The strategy identifies the areas of focus for the coming five years and supports the delivery of the wider Estate Strategy.

The University's new single supplier non-hazardous waste contract has just completed its first year. As well as delivering significant financial savings for departments it has provided a step change in waste data. This has significantly reduced the administrative burden of annual mandatory reporting the University undertakes and will facilitate setting a measurable waste target for the first time. This work will be completed over the coming year and the popular Swap Shop has been replaced by an equipment re-use service called WarpIT to further support departments in reducing waste.

In addition to specific schemes to support particular areas of the Environmental Sustainability Policy the team runs a project which helps departments and teams improve their environment profile across a wide range of topics. The NUS-administered Green Impact scheme rewards positive environmental behavior, trains some of our students in environmental auditing, and gives everyone involved a system to follow.

Although we have no remit over college buildings we run another NUS-administered engagement project called Student Switch Off. This has been very successful and has had more support from students in Oxford than anywhere else in the country.

The team reports on progress across its wide range of work areas on an annual basis and the latest report will be available online shortly. Previous years' reports are also available online². The report also meets the requirements for Oxford's membership of the International Sustainable Campus Network.

¹ http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/estatesdirectorate/documents/environment/Carbon_Management_Strategy_FINAL_for_web.pdf

² http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/estatesdirectorate/documents/environment/environmentalsustainabilityreports/Sustainability_Report_2013.pdf

Do get in touch if you would like to get involved with any of our work, through any of the following channels:

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@oxfordenvsust
<https://www.facebook.com/OxfordEnvSust>.

The Green Paper on Higher Education

DAVID PALFREYMAN

THE much-heralded and long-awaited Green Paper on Higher Education at last emerged from the BIS HQ on 6th November 2015 – ‘*Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*’, Cm 9141, BIS/15/623. The Consultation closes 15th January 2016.

The media and blog-o-sphere speculation over the months running up to its issue has been mixed with speculation about what the Government’s annual Spending Review will mean for HE. The Universities Minister, Jo Johnson, himself added to the speculation over a potentially tough and radical Green Paper when back in September he told the V-Cs at their UUK annual away-day that ‘teaching is highly variable across higher education’ with a ‘patchiness’ ranging from the ‘extraordinary’ to the ‘lamentable’. In some institutions there has been a focus on pursuing the cash and kudos of research at the expense of neglecting teaching: even to the extent of academics and students striking what he saw as a ‘disengagement contract’ – citing Palfreyman and Tapper, *‘Reshaping the University: The Rise of the Regulated Market in Higher Education’* (Oxford University Press, 2014). In fact, this is not an innovative analysis and a catchy phrase cleverly invented by my co-author and me – we were referring to David Riesman’s 1980 assessment of mass USA HE where the student-consumer seeking party time and the academic-provider wanting research time agree not to trouble each other too much. There is, as we put it, ‘a cosy convenient conspiracy’ whereby (in Riesman’s words):

‘Even the most shoddy, cut-rate, and cut-throat degrees are not necessarily frauds on the consumer. They may, in fact, be examples of collusion between academic vendor and student buyer to secure a credential at some monetary cost but almost no cost in time or effort.’

This is not, warned the Minister, ‘a contract I want taxpayers to underwrite’ and he expressed determination to ‘address’ shoddy teaching that ‘must be driven out of the system’. We do not know how all this went down with the huddled mass of V-Cs (the collective noun for such creatures in the 1980s as they gathered within the CVCP (now the UUK) was ‘a hot-bed of cold-feet’ in terms of their alleged feebleness in resisting the Thatcher funding cuts; today we might think in terms of an ‘ignorance’ of V-Cs as to what actually goes on at the chalk-face, or perhaps a ‘complacency’ or ‘arrogance’ in terms of not really caring anyway). He was, however, later publicly told off by one V-C who – rather pompously – declared that he must not be seen talking down UK HE plc given its export earnings by way of recruiting international students: clearly, the Emperor must always be declared to be fully and finely clothed (despite so much evidence to the contrary in the annual HEPI surveys of just what teaching the students get and the damning ‘Which?’ survey of whether they can detect value-for-money). In fact, Johnson also warned the V-Cs that they should correct for current ‘significant in-

formation asymmetries’ by providing ‘greater transparency’ on how the fee income is spent and on ‘what actual teaching’ will be delivered (each as called for by the influential ‘Which?’ whose website contains a depressing wealth of negative material about how HEIs sail close to the wind in ignoring consumer law). And all this is indeed something the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has belatedly also recently begun to challenge universities about, usefully reminding them that under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 a University is simply in Law a ‘trader’ in the business of supplying a service (teaching and assessment) to the student-consumer... (Chapter 6 of Palfreyman and Tapper, *op cit*, on ‘The Student as Consumer’ and Chapter 12 on ‘The Student Contract’ in Farrington and Palfreyman (2012, Oxford University Press), *‘The Law of Higher Education’*: a student-university Model Agreement is offered as a template on pp 443-447.)

So, several months after the Minister put the ‘denial’ of V-Cs on notice, what does his Green Paper propose to do about the 2015 State of HE and by way of building on the 2011 BIS document *‘Students at the Heart of the System’*? The 2015 Green Paper runs to just over 100 pages and is to be greatly welcomed as an attempt to create a more effective market in HE and one in which the fee-paying student-customer is given better consumer protection.

* * *

‘This consultation contains proposals to reshape the higher education landscape to have students at its heart. Its core aims are to raise teaching standards, provide greater focus on graduate employability, widen participation in higher education, and open up the sector to new high-quality entrants... [also] to reduce the regulatory burden on the sector.’

The Green Paper notes that ‘the graduate earnings gap is in decline’ and that ‘teaching has been regarded as the poor cousin to academic research’ – hence the need for the proposed (manifesto commitment) TEF, and in addition for enhanced competition from new HE providers by way of ‘a faster route to becoming a university’ (‘More choice between providers means that students can demand better value for money for their tuition fees.’). Moreover, ‘we also propose to ensure protections are in place for students if an institution closes a course or exits the sector’ – in real and efficient markets businesses do go bust (and need to do so if the market is to be effective – no zombie universities!).

Action is required to tackle ‘imperfect information about teaching quality, course content and graduate outcomes’, citing the annual HEPI surveys referred to above. And also to deal with the fact that ‘teaching quality is variable’ – the TEF will allow the highly-rated HEIs to up fees ‘in line with inflation’ from 2017/18 (say, CPI at 2% in 2017/18 thereby adding £180 for 2018/19 to the £9000 fixed from 2012/13?); and it ‘should change providers’ behaviour’ (or some will just find themselves

‘withdrawing from the sector’ and thereby ‘leaving space for new entrants’....).

But what is ‘excellence’ in the proposed TEF? This is to be considered via the Consultation and then ‘the criteria and metrics used for the TEF will develop over time’ as administered by ‘a panel of independent experts [‘convened for each discipline’] against an assessment framework’ – that said, the BIS ‘ambition for the TEF is far reaching’, and may well include the HEI’s ‘track record’ in relation to its ‘having measures in place to facilitate the access and success of disadvantaged groups’ (hence the OfS inherits not just what is left of HEFCE’s functions but also rolls in the OFFA). The QAA one assumes, as a creature owned by the sector, might yet survive and be contracted by the OfS to provide it with the TEF assessments of Higher Education Providers (HEPs) – their ‘teaching intensity’, their students’ ‘learning gain’, ‘how they are addressing any issue of grade inflation’, etc, etc.

The TEF metrics will be ‘valid... robust... comprehensive... credible... current...’ – and will be applied across all HEPs ‘in a consistent, transparent and fair way’. So, no great challenges there then! The focus, initially at least, will be on employment, retention, student satisfaction; and also taking into account ‘student commitment to learning’ (attendance at lectures and seminars?), ‘training and employment of staff’ (how much teaching is fobbed off onto casuals? – perhaps also asking awkward questions about whether the academics are teacher-trained?), and ‘teaching intensity’ (good news for the Oxford Tutorial approach? – as indeed experienced by the Minister himself as he ‘read’ Modern History at Balliol).

And attention must be paid, as already noted, to the exposure by the worthy and wonderful ‘*Which?*’ of HEPs ‘not complying with all of their legal obligations’ – as well as to the CMA 2015 guidance on the application of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 to the student-university contract (‘We will consider how the TEF can best drive best practice in compliance with consumer law...’ – Farrington and Palfreyman could ask for no more!).

The Green Paper mentions the possibility of radically invading historic university autonomy in the name of social justice by the OfS perhaps having the draconian power ‘to set targets for providers that are failing to make progress on agreed widening’. Depending on just what is meant by ‘targets’ and ‘progress’, this is potentially a major change in that it takes OFFA beyond what it is at present prohibited from doing, by way of interfering with admissions, under the HEA 2004 that established it. Be clear – OFFA can lawfully demand only that PoshUni sets targets for increasing applications from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and is barred from requiring a university to achieve admissions targets of any kind. One awaits the Independent Schools Council’s response to this Green Paper idea by 15th January! (Fewer Jo Johnsons getting into Oxford from public schools and Home Counties posh postcodes, and all those massive school fees wasted and – once again, as in the 1960s/70s – more oiks such as the author from a State school and Manchester cluttering up Oxford colleges?)

There is need ‘to transform the regulatory landscape’ now that ‘the majority of funding for course costs flows through students’ – time for ‘the Office for Students (OfS)’ as ‘a new regulator and student champion’, over-

seeing ‘an open, market-based and affordable system’. This new entity would also oversee the faster single route for new entrants to the HE market, controlling the allocation of Degree Awarding Powers and the use of the title ‘University’ – and replacing the role now undertaken by the quaint old Privy Council. Most of this, of course, will need primary legislation. The OIA and UCAS would each continue to be ‘sector owned’; while the BIS itself might organise the distribution of the remnants of good old UGC-style teaching grants (mainly the £1500 or so top-up for STEM courses). The OfS would be financed by a sharing of its costs across the HEPs it regulates. The suggested HE regulatory model borrows heavily from that developed since the 1980s as former nationalised industries (telecommunications, the utilities, etc) have been deregulated and privatised – OfWat, OfCom, etc.

The Secretary of State will direct the OfS – end of the very English constitutional concept of the 1919 UGC as a buffer mediating between the State and independent universities, a concept steadily watered down by the shift to the UFC and then to the businessmen-dominated HEFCE. There will also be a power for the BIS ‘to enter and inspect’ (!) HEPs if there is reason to suspect ‘a breach of the conditions of receipt of (direct [research funds?] or indirect [H/EU tuition fees financed by loans?]) public funding’. (This may well stem from the frustration of ministers when confronted by the financial scandals and governance failure at a few HEIs in recent years.)

As a piece of ‘Further deregulation’ the Higher Education Colleges (HECs), as are most of the post-92 ex-poly universities, will be granted the same legal freedoms as the chartered pre-92 entities: the latter are legal persons with the same legal powers as a biological person, while the powers of the former are only what their statutory basis under ERA 1988 permits (i.e. ‘unnecessarily restrictive and burdensome’ such that their legal framework and constitution may ‘stifle innovation and growth’). The HEC could, for instance, elect to dissolve itself and become, say, a limited charitable company (as is the LSE or London Met). And the Privy Council could lose its power to approve changes to the ‘governing documents’ of HEIs, the task being transferred to the OfS in terms of protecting any ‘public interest’.

The Green Paper suggests improving ‘the research funding landscape to make it more strategic, coherent and effective’ – so, probably the exit of HEFCE from any role and enter some entity in accordance with the Nurse Review? The REF, at an estimated cost of £250m (sic) for the 2014 version (c.f. £65m or so for the 2008 RAE), needs to be simplified and its burden/cost reduced – ideas to the BIS by 15/1/16, please.

On ‘Provider exit and student protection’ the Green Paper proposes that the HE industry and/or all HEPs individually should set up an exit process for failed HEPs that duly protects ‘the interests of the student’ – and failure might, in extreme circumstances, include being ushered out of existence ‘as a result of regulatory activity by OfS’! The exit scheme would either somehow offer continuity of study (other HEIs taking in the students?) or appropriate financial compensation (not that, as yet, any Court has definitively assessed the range and level of such a damages award under contract law...), the cost perhaps funded through ‘an insurance policy, a bond, reserve funds, or Escrow accounts’. Consideration of

OfS-inspired ‘mergers, amalgamations, acquisitions or restructuring’ would also be relevant (all, of course, subject to ‘the formal Insolvency Regime for any type of provider’...).

The consultees, thee and me and anybody and everybody (legal person or real human), will now need to decide whether and how to respond on any or all of the above, perhaps in the context of considering whether the Green Paper helpfully takes English HE in the right direction or in total it amounts to the worrying nationalisation of English universities (in much the same way as, arguably, via a different mechanism, the Scottish universities are about to lose their institutional autonomy).

* * *

So much for the Green Paper: next the Nurse Review of the Research Councils. This appeared on 19th November 2015 (BIS/15/625; ‘*Ensuring a successful UK research endeavour*’). There is space here only for a few comments on the 36 pages. It recommends (*inter alia*): the strengthening of RCUK to help the Research Councils to work together “more closely” and for it to become “a stronger strategic voice for research” as a renamed/re-vamped “RUK”; the “mapping of the UK research landscape” to achieve “high-level strategic policy-making”; the maintenance of the HEFCE REF “functions” within “any reformed system”; and retaining the current Research Councils. There will also be a new cross-department “Ministerial Committee”.

The Spending Review in November slashed the BIS budget by a mere 17% – less than half of the level of cuts some were predicting. And HE did not do at all badly in the continuing 2015-2020 Phase II Age of Austerity (having also done rather well 2010-2015 in Phase I thanks to the £9k fees): loan money for p/t and for p/g students; lifting of the cap on u/g numbers (new colleges in Kidlington, Marston, Barton?); protection of the STEM u/g teaching subsidy (the Humanities still seen as useless albeit doubtless deliciously decorative in terms of what bits of HE supposedly drive the Economy); and protection of the funding for Big Science (of which via the RCs the UoF gets a large chunk). The downside is: the conversion of the last of the student social access grants to loans; shifting HEFCE/OFFA support funding for access to being something to be met by the collective of HEIs from their own finances; and increasing the cost of student debt by messing with the threshold for repayment (fewer customers for HE generally? – if not for Oxford specifically). The Nurse Review recommendation

concerning the creation of an RUK was accepted, as was implicitly its defence of the value to the nation of Science funding.

* * *

Finally, I fear, however, that, with regard to the Green Paper’s entirely laudable intent to introduce greater consumer protection for the hapless fee-paying undergraduate, the teaching quantum and quality in undergraduate HE is at present protected only by the role of professional bodies in those vocational courses (medicine, nursing, law, surveying, engineering, etc) where the gaining of the degree is also an entry to a regulated activity keen to control access and standards. The proposals in the Green Paper will, sadly, probably do as little in relation to the bulk of university teaching as the QAA, the CMA, and the thickening layers of fancy P-V-Cs (The Student Experience, Teaching Quality, Learning Enhancement, etc) have achieved, and hence we must await the ultimate force for consumer protection of the student-customer: the arrival of the *MumsNet* generation of students in the few years’ time.

These vociferous and articulate Mums of Islington will be challenging via social media and the CEO’s personal email address the ‘squirm’ of V-Cs when they discover that for Jocasta’s £9000 she has reached the end of Term 1’s overcrowded lectures with the zero-hours grad student adjunct leading related seminars of 25 or more and has yet to submit any written work – or is now in Term 2 sans any face-to-face feedback on Term 1’s modest assignment, or is in Term 3 and all lectures and seminars have ceased! (A sorry state of affairs based on a young relative’s experience at a mighty Russell, and countless colleagues’ reports of ‘the student experience’ for their nieces and nephews across the HE industry – Shame on the ‘misrepresentation’ of V-Cs, even if, one hopes, it is merely (innocent or recklessly) negligent misrepresentation and never (deliberately) fraudulent).

Pending this new force impacting on English universities, we must rely on the good survey work of HEPI (albeit, of course, studiously ignored by UUK – a ‘short-sightedness’ of V-Cs?) and on the power of ‘Which?’ (albeit not yet deploying its nuclear weapon under the Consumer Rights Act) – but preferably reinforced by a few timely CMA-inspired prosecutions by local trading standards departments as the enforcers under the CRA15 of the most dodgy university ‘traders’.

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author’s name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

Munni Mann: Or, A Vision in a Dream

A Fragment (Interrupted by a personal computer from Bluescreen)

In Albion did Munni Mann
A sleazy treasure house decree:
Where Thames, the tainted river, ran
Past bank vaults numberless to man
Down to a fished-out sea.
So twice five miles of cut and thrust
Housed wharves and towers built fit to bust;
And there were rooftops bright with swimming pools,
Where blossomed many a money-laden spree;
And here were mores ancient as town walls,
Including scandal, fraud, chicanery.

But oh! that deep financial spasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a hedge fund cover!
A savage place! unholy and affronted
As e're upon a haven isle were hunted
Tax dodgers wailing for their own dear mother!
And from this spasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if the men in braces red were heavy breathing,
A money-laundry momentarily was cast:
Amid whose swift half-intermittent blast
Transactions fizzed like bats from hell
Or deal on deal beneath the addict's spell:
And mid these dancing flights at once and ever
It flung up momently the tainted river.
Five miles meandering with a hazy notion
'Twixt poor and rich the tainted river ran,
Then reached the bank vaults numberless to man,
And sank in tumult to a plastic ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Munni heard from far
The same old voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the house of treasure
Floated midway on the waves
Where were heard the gasps of pleasure
From the launderers, money slaves;
It was a miracle of rare device
A money treasure house with heart of ice!

A gentle with no love for war
In a vision I recall:
It was an Internationalist
And with his speech he raised his fist
Calling for fair shares for all.
Could I revive within me
The tenor of his thrust,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with others true and just
I would pluck that house from air,
That sleazy house! those hearts to break!
And all who heard and all who cheered,
Now all should cry, Feel weird! Be afeared!
His red-rimmed eyes, his crazy beard!
On your knees, despair and quake
Tighten your belt, get used to bread,
For he on all the cake hath fed,
And drunk too much to stay awake.

With apologies to S.T.Coleridge

DAVID BRAUND

David Braund is a retired computer software consultant, now active in literary and musical pursuits. He graduated from St. Edmund Hall with a degree in Geography in 1962, and has recently contributed a number of poems to the Hall Writers' Forum.

Communication is Not the Only Problem

PETER OPPENHEIMER

INTERMITTENT administration-watchers might suppose the following email from Wellington Square to signal the onset of its bright new 2015-16 strategy “to improve communication about University business and to increase transparency about decision-making”:

Dear Colleague,

I would like to invite you to take part in a communications survey, which is running until 19 December.

The survey aims to canvass the views of members of the collegiate University about current channels of communication and how they can be improved. It covers university-wide publications, such as Blueprint, the Gazette, as well as functional communications from areas such as Finance, Libraries, and the Oxford Learning Institute.

By taking part in the survey, you can let us know what you think about internal communications, what areas could be improved, and what developments you would like to see. Your responses will be used to improve our current channels and help shape communication strategy in the future.

For further information and to complete the survey online please visit <http://www.ox.ac.uk...etc>, etc.

If they do indeed suppose that, they couldn't be more wrong. The email—sent by the Public Affairs Directorate—actually dates from the better part of a decade ago, namely December 2008. Of course it led nowhere, and has been long forgotten. But the attitude underlying it remains, and indeed has spawned further progeny.

I have referred previously to the Registrar's invitation in May 2015 to “all members of University and College staff ... to complete an on-line survey about your opinions and experiences of the University's central administrative services (UAS)”. [See *Oxford Magazine* No. 361, Fifth Week, Trinity Term, 2015, “A Flawed Survey of University Opinion”; and No. 364, Second Week, Michaelmas Term, 2015, “The Unhappy Culture of Administrative Dominance”]. The design of this survey was not intellectually respectable. It was variously slanted to produce favourable answers, to generate spurious comparisons “benchmarking” Oxford's central administration against those of some other (non-collegiate) universities, and to divert attention from the real issues of budget and manpower constraints.

The survey elicited replies from 1,123 staff members across the collegiate University, three-quarters of them administrators, about half from the centre itself and half from elsewhere, mainly academic departments and faculties. Disturbingly, three out of eleven major sections of the central administration (IT, Estates and Legal) were rated by 30% or more of respondents as “adequate” or “poor” rather than “good” or “excellent”. The results of the survey available on the

University Intranet reveal little more information than this about the feedback obtained.

Rather than comment on these numbers, the central administration decided to launch its bright new communications policy by announcing three termly Question and Answer sessions, where selected staff from Wellington Square would elucidate “major issues” to a wider University audience. The topic for the first occasion, on 23rd November 2015, was “Personnel and Equality”. The only major issue for Oxford in this domain is the transparent need to cut the headcount of central administrative personnel by at least 500, and the criteria of equality which might operate here, bearing in mind that the academic freedom provisions of the University's Statute XII apply (astonishingly) to senior administrative personnel, though not to junior.

The subsequent occasion in Hilary Term is scheduled for 18th March. The new Vice-Chancellor is to address “Current Challenges facing the University”. Professor Richardson's decision to speak on this subject at an early stage in her tenure gives us hope that she will take a detached view and not rely on a brief tailored for her by the central administration.

The locations of these first two meetings are respectively the Martin School (formerly the History Faculty Library, and before that the Indian Institute) and the newly-built Blavatnik School, two leading examples of bad judgement by the University authorities in their use of both real estate and capital funds. The Trinity Term 2016 meeting on Capital Projects may afford additional insight into such misjudgements.

All in all, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that these sessions, while designed to make the academic community feel more informed, aim also to keep it at arm's length and subservient to the administration. If there was any willingness to involve it in University policy-making (as it was involved in the 20th century), the administration would surely have devoted one of the Q and A sessions, most probably the very first, to the Government's new Green Paper on Higher Education Reforms, whose publication had been foreshadowed in the national press for months. Instead, two weeks after the Green Paper was published the Registrar, in an email to “all University and college staff”, reported that Council would be considering the administration's draft response to the Government on 30th November, and anyone so inclined was “encouraged”(sic) to communicate their views. Absent the expressly sought opinion of the academic community—in this case most suitably through the colleges—Council and the central administration have no moral authority whatsoever to respond in the name of the collegiate University to such a major issue as the Green Paper. And it is, after all, not obligatory for a response to be supplied.

The Green Paper heralds some moving of the official goalposts, de-emphasising the REF (Research Excellence Framework) in favour of a new TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework). To be sure, it contains

absurdities, pinning onto universities, for example, responsibility not merely for teaching and assessing their students, but also for predicting students' career paths after graduation, and indeed for confronting the much wider issue of social mobility, which successive British governments have not succeeded even in defining adequately, let alone ameliorating. Institutions deemed to be performing well under these headings will be permitted to raise undergraduate fees in line with inflation. The invitation to universities to treat the Green Paper as a consultation document between now and the middle of January is not, one suspects, meant to be taken very seriously.

Despite these defects, the Green Paper could provide an important opportunity to restore academic self-determination in Oxford. There are two aspects here. The first is to exploit the current mood swing in Whitehall so as to cut back the pretensions of Wellington Square to be running the University. Support and teaching of undergraduates in particular—which is the main focus of the Green Paper—remains at Oxford essentially a college function, even though the central administration has done its best to interfere. Reduced emphasis on research and publications, especially in the Social Sciences and Humanities, where the academic rationale for research is basically to enrich the teaching function, underlines the case for getting rid of the (non-Clinical) Divisional structure, along with a clutch of at least 75 administrative positions. The point is reinforced by the Green Paper's emphasis on a reduction in regulatory burdens, as well as “better value for money” for both students and taxpayers, not least through amalgamation of HEFCE (the Higher Education Funding Council for England) and OFFA (the Office for Fair Access) in a new combined body to be called the Office for Students. This piece of unfinished business dates from the Browne Report of 2010, which introduced student fees.

Yet focus on specific tasks will not of itself be sufficient to secure change. During the 1980s and 1990s it was indeed functional requirements that spurred the growth of central administration. Not so today. The North reforms at the end of the 1990s—especially aggrandisement of the Vice-Chancellorship and replacement of the General Board of the Faculties by the aforementioned Divisions (see TJH's recent Leader in *Oxford Magazine*, No. 365, Fifth Week, Michaelmas Term, 2015)—severed the crucial bottom-up linkages which had tied central administration to academic priorities. Since then, growth of the administration has been self-serving and autonomous. With no control on its overall staff numbers or cost, the latter is now

approaching £100 million *per annum*. And the point has been reached where many central officials—in IT, in Personnel, in Finance—do little but service one another, and have no connection with the University as such.

Much more serious, the soaring cost of central bureaucracy has itself been the principal driver behind the financially motivated doubling of postgraduate student numbers and its corollaries, notably aggravated shortage of student housing, misleading explanations to justify it, and ugly buildings to relieve it. The University Council has consequently been unable to engage in any strategic planning of the University's overall size and structure, and has become estranged from the colleges as a result. No wonder it bleats ineffectually about communication and transparency.

The second aspect of restoring academic self-governance is that the academic community—in Congregation, through faculties and in colleges—needs to be much more assertive about its role and objectives, including academic standards. Oxford (plus Cambridge and a few others) should opt out of daily control by Whitehall, notably over student fees, and form an independent Ivy League somewhat along US lines. The case for this has been glaringly obvious for years (see, *inter alia*, Peter Oppenheimer, “Towards an English (or UK) Ivy League”, *Oxford Magazine*, No. 305, Michaelmas Term, 2010). It would be in the interest not just of the Ivy League group itself, but of all other UK universities as well. Much larger private funds would flow in, and Government for its part would be incentivised—that is to say, under pressure—to contribute more to institutions judged deserving and less able to attract private money. The latter is clearly the reason why the present Conservative Government has lent no encouragement to existing UK universities to “go private”, even while approving of “new” profit-seeking ventures in higher education.

The Ivy League universities themselves would also give a lead in serving social justice through efficient means-testing of fees and charges, with the better-off paying a lot more and many others a lot less than at present. The accumulation of endowments to facilitate the process would be a long-run fund-raising priority. An early key element in ensuring “value for money” to students would be—as in any decent not-for-profit enterprise—to impose tight budget constraints on administration staff numbers and costs. There is obviously a risk that Oxford's central administration will oppose moves of this kind for the sake of their own comfort and responsibility-avoidance. One can only hope that their consciences, and the determination of right-thinking professionals, will get the better of them.

The editors invite and welcome contributions from all our readers. The content of Oxford Magazine relies largely on what arrives spontaneously on the editors' desk and is usually published, after legal vetting, as received. The Magazine is published on-line within the University as well as in print form.

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Medical Interviews

CHRIS WINEARLS

Interview dates are in the diary for December 2015. For the last ten years on the second weekend of December I have foregone Sunday lunch. At two o'clock we start Medical Admissions interviews. Thirty personal statements have been read the day before and points highlighted as cues for questions.

I take the process of interviewing and ranking very seriously, conscious of how much is at stake for the applicant, the University, the College and eventually the public. Perhaps I am being too earnest? I will meet fewer than 10% of the interviewees and my score will be one of eight. However as a clinician I am explicitly asked to express a view on suitability for medicine and to assess: empathy; a motivation to practise medicine; communication; honesty and integrity; ethical awareness; alignment of values with the NHS constitution; ability to work with others and capacity for sustained and intense work. I have fifteen minutes—2 minutes per criterion. My co-interviewer is a scientist who will assess: problem solving; intellectual curiosity and communication skills compatible with the tutorial format.

Aware of scrutiny, and criticism of the process which I believe to be unjustified, there is a lot in the back of my mind before we even start with the first candidate. First I remind myself that to "win" a place at Oxford is difficult but in itself an achievement. It is both a privilege and an extraordinary opportunity to study here. I know because I did not. It is special because of the environment, the college system, tutorial teaching and contact with some exceptional scientists and clinicians. So, the question is not, "*Is this candidate suitable for medicine?*" but, "*Is this candidate someone who will thrive in this system and repay the opportunity?*"

Second there is a slight tension between the clinician and the scientist interviewers. The latter is looking for a teachable, clever science enthusiast but the clinician for a balance of talents and a strong interest in human health. Most of those selected will "do" pure biomedical science for three years and clinical medicine for the next forty three. Both of us want to identify the special talent and potential so that Oxford can be a platform for a scientific career or a clinical one forever underpinned by a scientific foundation. Almost all the candidates are suitable for a medical school but we are not looking to provide just basic vocational training. Secretly we hope that our students will go on to be the *prima inter pares* in the profession, leaders and innovators.

Third I am aware that OFFA, the Office for Fair Access, is looking over our shoulders and remind myself that, to quote their website:

"The national strategy's vision is that all those with the potential to benefit from higher education have equal opportunity to participate and succeed, on a course and in an institution that best fits their potential, needs and ambitions for employment or further study."

This sounds reasonable but I know that this is not all that is meant. They are also seeking to make sure that:

"universities and colleges are explicitly committed to increasing participation in higher education among under-represented groups."

Gender, ethnicity, schooling and social background of applicants and those selected are being monitored. We have recently been told that "Half of all schools sent no pupils to do medicine." So what? Reading medicine is not a right any more than training with a view to being an airline pilot, a judge, a director of a PLC or a premier league football player. If the problem is unsatisfactory education in preparation for applying for a career in medicine then it is the preparation that should be fixed not the competition for selection.

This is the cause of my discomfort. Of course I must not and will not be discriminatory but I am expected to be discriminating. We must choose the best candidates not the best mix of candidates. However I know I am unconsciously calibrating my scoring and expecting more of some than others.

The GCSEs do not really help as all the candidates have a full slate of A*s. The BMAT scores are not yet declared. The school references are all much the same—paeans of praise. We have had the "best biologist in a decade," twice for the same year from the same school. Some candidates will have had help with personal statements, will have arranged mock interviews and had their work experience facilitated; their class sizes are smaller and populated by clever motivated peers. Parents may be doctors or scientists so current issues are known and discussed, and journals probably lie around the house. These candidates are at the front of the starting grid. How can we choose fairly? It has to be the interview.

By chance I was listening to "Broadcasting House", on Radio 4 a week after my three days of interviewing. There was an item on a remarkable man called John Freeman described in the *Sunday Times* as "Face to Face pioneer and war hero dies at 99." He was a son of a chancery barrister, educated at Westminster School and Brasenose College Oxford (I wonder how his interview went? Well, I suppose). He was a "Desert Rat", served as Brigade Major under Montgomery, was a Labour MP, later a Minister in Attlee's government (resigning over NHS charges) and was the interviewer on "Face to Face" from 1959-1962. He was described as "intensely courteous", "tough" with "great forensic skills." He set the interviewees "at ease and got them to explain and expound." Only Lord Reith bettered him.

Perhaps this is what we should imitate. I have decided that to be fair to each candidate the first questions are probably best based on their expressed interests rather than those of the interviewer. One can discern just how deeply they have thought about the subject and how well they can explain it. Then one moves on to general

knowledge or invites them to nominate something topical. Problem solving under interview conditions is tough unless one takes them through the steps of the argument with gentle and encouraging nudges. I sometimes doubt I can make a valid judgment on suitability for a clinical career in 30 minutes. Very occasionally one can make it quite quickly.

There is some comfort for me when it is all over and I learn who was awarded a place. Of course I am pleased when a candidate of whom we thought highly was similarly rated by interviewers at another college but I am worried about my credulity if others have been disappointed. Last year 6/9 that we placed in the top tercile were similarly placed at the second college at which all candidates are automatically interviewed. 5/9 of those in the bottom tercile were similarly placed but 2/9 were in the top tercile at the other College. Were we being Freemans or more like John Humphrys, interviewers or inquisitors? I like to think that we were fair and that, even if our judgements were not necessarily confirmed by other interviewers, the end result of the complex selection process coordinated across the medical school as a whole is the best that can be achieved.

I meet the successful candidates four years later when they start in the Clinical School. They are now quite different, no longer diffident and formal. They all remember their interviews in detail, politely saying it was tough but fair. At the first dinner for the clinical

students I can venture *off piste* and ask a bit more about their lives. More than once the candidates from “under-represented groups” have told me how they were advised against applying here and how little support or preparation they were offered. Their own offers to speak to the 6th Forms have not been taken up.

In January, six weeks after the interviews, it was the time for Clinical Finals (Second BM)—two written papers and then face to face in front of patients. This was the cohort we selected in 2008 plus the “Graduate Entry” (students admitted following after an earlier non-medical degree). 98% of candidates passed and most of these comfortably. The top 16 candidates had Prize Vivas. These are 16 five minute single topic interviews, marked by 32 examiners. They performed, unsurprisingly, brilliantly, impressing us and the external examiners even more. What predicted these excellent outcomes? Apparently it is performance in the First BM. The top three students were Graduate Entry. Although discomfort was replaced by joy there was still the nagging doubt. Was it the choosing or the teaching? What has happened to those who had not been given a place? At least we know that our graduates go on to do well in their professional examinations, e.g. Oxford graduates performed better than those from other medical schools in the three part examination for physicians—MRCP (Membership of the Royal College of Physicians)

We must be doing something right.

Academic boycotts or Enlightenment values?

MICHAEL YUDKIN and DENIS NOBLE

AMONG the 340 or so UK academics who signed an advertisement that appeared in *The Guardian* on 27 October 2015, eight gave their affiliation as ‘University of Oxford’. The advertisement read:

As scholars associated with British universities, we are deeply disturbed by Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestinian land, the intolerable human rights violations that it inflicts on all sections of the Palestinian people, and its apparent determination to resist any feasible settlement. Responding to the appeal from Palestinian civil society, we therefore declare that we will not:

- accept invitations to visit academic institutions;
- act as referees in any of their processes;
- participate in conferences funded, organised or sponsored by them, or otherwise cooperate with them.

We will, however, continue to work with our Israeli colleagues in their individual capacities.

We will maintain this position until the State of Israel complies with international law, and respects universal principles of human rights’.

Anyone who doubts whether this statement amounts to the declaration of a boycott should take care not to be

misled by the clause about ‘continuing to work with our Israeli colleagues in their individual capacities.’ Visits to universities, refereeing applications for promotion, and participation in conferences are central to the lives of academics, and to withdraw from these activities in respect of Israelis is unequivocally to discriminate against them.

Such discrimination is excluded by the Statutes of ICSU, the International Council of Science. The members of ICSU include national scientific academies (e.g. the Royal Society and the National Academy of Sciences of the USA) representing 142 countries, and International Scientific Unions (e.g. the International Astronomical Union and the International Union of Physiological Sciences) representing 31 disciplines. Its Statute 5 is the closest approach we have to a universally accepted gold standard for the conduct of science. Statute 5 states:

The Principle of Universality (freedom and responsibility) of Science: the free and responsible practice of science is fundamental to scientific advancement and human and environmental well-being... In advocating the free and responsible practice of science, ICSU promotes equitable opportunities for access to science and its benefits, and opposes discrimination based on such factors as ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language,

political or other opinion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age.

The Principle of Universality, although formulated by ICSU in terms of the practice of science, extends to all academic disciplines (though the inclusion of 'political or other opinion' might possibly be contested by some scholars in humanities and social science). Statute 5 is not empty of meaning and is not a formality. It is a specific application, in the context of scholarship, of ideals that have informed our civilisation since the Enlightenment. It states that scholars must be treated without discrimination on the grounds of features (such as their sex, their language or the colour of their skin) that are irrelevant to their professional activity. It also states that scholars are not to be held liable for the actions of others: adherents of particular religions are not responsible for what their religious authorities do (we mustn't discriminate against Roman Catholic colleagues because of the Vatican's view of homosexuality), and citizens of particular states are not responsible for what their governments do.

Scholars who do not consider themselves bound by these internationally accepted norms, but choose instead to hold academics or their institutions responsible for the actions of their governments, will have cause to boycott universities in many countries of the world. For if illegal occupation of land outside a state's boundaries merits an academic boycott of Israel then—since moral consistency requires like cases to be treated alike—Chinese, Indian and Russian universities must be boycotted too. The decision by the academics who organised the advertisement in the *Guardian* to call for a boycott of Israeli universities and not these others is a further act of discrimination.

We, by contrast, follow Statute 5 in believing that scholars are not responsible for the actions of their gov-

ernments. However, they are naturally responsible for their own actions. If an individual academic is personally guilty of grave professional misconduct or abuses of human rights it may well be appropriate to boycott him or her, but the allegation of such misconduct or crimes should be clear and specific and the evidence needs to be assessed by an impartial tribunal. Vague assertions of 'complicity' will not do. In any case innocent colleagues should not be punished collectively for the crimes of others (see 'Academic Boycotts' by David Rodin and Michael Yudkin, *Journal of Political Philosophy*: Volume 19, 2011, pp. 465–485).

Long experience has taught us that whenever we write in defence of the Principle of Universality we are likely to be described as 'lackeys of the Zionist lobby' or 'apologists for the government of Israel'. Such *ad hominem* attacks are, of course, intended to divert attention away from the strength of our argument about Universality. Our political views are in fact irrelevant to the issue. Nonetheless for the avoidance of doubt we shall state here that we have no love for Binyamin Netanyahu's government, and that, like the large majority of the academics that the *Guardian* advertisers want us to boycott, we oppose the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

And if someone asks us how, if we resist a boycott of Israeli universities, we intend to solve the problem of Israel/Palestine, the answer is that we don't know, any more than secretaries of state Baker, Christopher, Albright and Kerry, presidents Clinton and George W. Bush, senator Mitchell, or the Quartet's envoy Blair have known. But one thing we do know is that this tragedy, which has already cost thousands of lives and ruined millions more, must never be used as an excuse to destroy the principle of non-discrimination that is universally accepted among scholars. We have no wish to return to a pre-Enlightenment world.

Refugees

Sir—The appeal by Thais Roque, Charlie Coughlan, and Bernard Sufrin for a campaign to be ignited for higher educational opportunities to be established for refugees, here in Oxford and beyond, is timely ('Refugees': *Oxford Magaine*, Nought Week, No 363). In addition to the Bureau of Information for Refugee Scholars, the authors might also have mentioned the work of the 'Council for at Risk Academics(Cara), founded in 1933 by William Beveridge as the Academic Assistance Council, renamed in 1936 the 'Society for Protection of Science and, since 1999, as Cara.

One of the increasing difficulties for those in the UK who are refugees or, more significantly, not yet refugees, rather caught in a catch 22 of interim residential statuses, is how to achieve the criteria/conditions for university entry. Over the last 25 years at what used to be Oxford College of Further Education, then Oxford and Cherwell College, now the City of Oxford College, a course has been running which has been able to offer access to HE opportunities for refugees and for those not yet refugees, for migrant workers, and, until they were outlawed from such educational opportunities, for asylum seekers. Many hundreds of students from Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Sudan, Darfur, Palestine, and Myanmar

TO THE EDITOR

have over the years succeeded on this one-year bespoke course and gone on to successful university and post-university careers.

In recent years, however, access to funding has become increasingly bureaucratic and restrictive. Student Finance England, now privatised, has since 2010 tended to allow loans and grants (the latter soon to disappear) only to those university applicants who have full refugee status or, for preference, UK citizenship. Those many students, the majority, who have interim statuses, having met the conditions of their university offers, frequently then find themselves barred by Student Finance England from university funding on the grounds that they don't "present" as permanent residents, with the result that, after a year of intense study, often against the pressures of employment

and family commitments, these students can't take up their university places. Battles with the Home Office's Lunar House, Croydon, even when supported in these Oxford cases by Oxford East MP, Andrew Smith, are invariably lost.

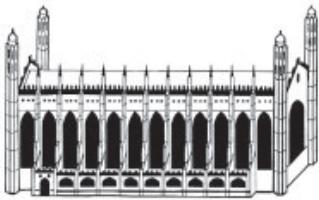
Almost all these students, past and present, have reached Oxford from fractured backgrounds and shattered educations. It is their fervent desire through education to qualify and so contribute to the lives of their families and to the economic and cultural life of the UK, instead of which education passes them by and they subsist in unskilled work, often in substandard accommodation and poor mental health.

At the time of writing it seems very likely that the kind of humane educational provision for refugees and pre-refugees which has been provided in further education here in Oxford for a quarter of a century will soon come to an end. Severe cuts in adult provision in further education have already been executed and more are to come. Of course Oxford University must provide opportunities for refugees. FE here has been doing so for years. Or did!

Yours sincerely

BRUCE ROSS-SMITH

Headington



Notes from Cambridge

If you want to know the rules, how easy is it to find them? Is it possible to make the domestic law of an ancient university user-friendly? And how are unintended consequences to be avoided? In making changes designed to improve access to, and comprehension of, its domestic laws, Cambridge has recently discovered that none of this is easy.

Chancellor Laud famously found Oxford's Statutes in a staggeringly confused heap in the seventeenth century and tidied them up; their latest substantive revision followed the North reforms at the turn of the present century, and took as its guiding principle the need for greater accessibility and clear language. Cambridge never had its Laud but it did overhaul its constitution following the recommendations of the Wass Syndicate established in 1988. The resulting new Statutes and Ordinances soon became as rebarbative as the old.

Cambridge has now had a 'Technical Revision' of its post-Wass Statutes up and running since February 2014. This was put in hand after repeated requests by the Board of Scrutiny for an overhaul of what was becoming an all-but impenetrable thicket as each year fresh Ordinances or revisions to old ones were added. This culminated in its Thirteenth Report (2008) with a recommendation that 'a Syndicate should be established *as soon as possible* [italics added] to undertake a revision of Statutes and Ordinances'.¹ This was not to involve substantive changes, merely reordering and general tidying up, to put the University's domestic legislation into a more logical shape and to make it easier to find what one was looking for. The Advisory Group which achieved this can only be thanked and congratulated. It was an enormous task. It had to be done through a series of consultative Reports before there could be any question of changes being approved by the Regent House, in a similar way to the consultations leading to the present proposals for changes to Statute XII in Oxford.

As it happened this all coincided with a separate pressure in Cambridge for substantive changes to the very body of Statute and Ordinance (= Regulation) which formed Cambridge's counterpart to Statute XII and its dependent Regulations. The Fourteenth Report of the Board of Scrutiny (2009) touched on the resulting furore in a recommendation:

*'That whatever the outcome of the further debates and discussions on the University's review of its disciplinary, dismissal and Grievance procedures, any binding rules and safeguards arising from those discussions which are not to be contained in Statutes must be promulgated in Ordinances.'*²

The furore referred to can best be revisited now by reading the record of one of those two-afternoon Discussions of the Senate which are always an indication of serious Regent House alarm. This Discussion—of the "Joint Report of the Council and the General Board on disciplinary, dismissal, and Grievance procedures",³ specifically on proposed changes to Cambridge's Statute U (= Oxford's

Statute XII)—was held on 24 November and 1 December 2009. Search the published Discussion for 'academic freedom' and you will find 65 hits.⁴ 'The heart of the matter is to make redundancy and dismissal easier,' as Ross Anderson put it. That was what speakers feared, and especially that they might find themselves out on their ears for exercising their hitherto protected academic freedom.

The reforming impulse in the Old Schools faded a little after this and a separate scheme came forward, this time just to change the Grievance procedure. That—in a familiar way—occurred much less challenge. An upset Regent House commonly gets back to its work after sounding its warnings. The Grievance changes affecting University Officers prompted only three speeches⁵ when they came up for Discussion of the "Joint Report of the Council and the General Board on the process for the redress of Grievances under Statute U"⁶ in the Spring of 2012. The general aims looked good. There was to be more use of mediation and attempts at speedier resolution of Grievances, some of which had been dragging on for years uncompleted. There were now to be clear stages, informal and formal and an appeal—hitherto lacking—was to be added, in line with the then current ACAS Code of Practice. Provision was to be made for the need to include harassment complaints, not envisaged when the Model Statute was drafted. If the Dignity at Work procedure did not deal with these satisfactorily the avenue of recourse by Grievance was to remain.

However, it was 'proposed that the procedure be set out in Ordinance, rather than Statute'. The level of the Grievance procedure was to drop in the legislative hierarchy. One change of detail has already proved unpopular in more than one Grievance process. The Model Statute on which both Oxford's Statute XII and Cambridge's Statute U were based had allowed a person with a Grievance to be accompanied by a 'friend'. This was now replaced by the employment law norm of allowing a colleague or a trade union representative, and that has since been applied restrictively, although it is of course intended to set a minimum.

Meanwhile, the 'Technical Review of the Statutes' was proceeding. That had made one proposal for change which went beyond mere reorganising. This was the idea of creating a new level of legislation, the Special Ordinance, to fit between Statute and Ordinance. (That is the level at which the new Grievance procedure was eventually placed.)

Oxford readers will remember how important the North reform of the Statutes thought it to reduce the former Statutes, Decrees and Regulations to just two: 'Statutes and Regulations'. Cambridge faces the requirement to put all its proposed Statute changes to the Privy Council, not having the Oxford distinction between Queen-in-Council Statutes and others which the University may adjust with Congregation's consent alone. So the idea was to simplify changes to certain former Cambridge Statutes by moving them down to a level where only the Regent

House's approval was needed. The most prominent candidate for that shift was and remains the former Statute U.

By November 2011, the Technical Review of the Statutes had arrived at a stage where it was possible to publish a special *Reporter* as a Supplementary Paper to Consultation Paper 9, containing a "Guide to the proposed new Statutes (and the continuing Statutes)" and a list of the proposed Special Ordinances.⁷ The faint but pursuing reader may begin to appreciate the scale of the task facing the Advisory Group in making all this intelligible and sufficiently attractive to draw busy speakers to a Discussion.

However, it is very clear. It shows that the former Statute U was to become a mere Special Ordinance, but not at once. Pending its final transfer downwards in the hierarchy of the legislation it was to become a Schedule to the new Statute C, *University Offices and Employment in the University*. Statute C, I, 8 now provides *Temporary and transitional provision for the Schedule* and allows it to be rescinded by Grace following a Report to the Regent House. There need be no further recourse to the Privy Council.

There has as yet been no publication of a Report to implement this plan, so anyone to whom the counterpart of Statute XII provisions applies, who has not kept up with this history, has to hunt for information if faced with a disciplinary or redundancy process. The old Statute U, with some parts removed to the new Statute D, which deals with the University Courts, is still hanging below Statute C as a Schedule.

Cambridge's HR website is not over-helpful to the bewildered searcher. Redundancy of University Officers is not listed by HR in the alphabetical list at 'policies and procedures', though the heading *Disciplinary action, Grievances and Appeals* may be found there.⁸ Two separate links are provided for University Officers and Unestablished Academic and Academic-related Staff (including Contract Research Staff) and another for Assistant Staff.⁹ The first takes the University Officer to Statute C, New Statutes and Special Ordinances 2014 (with a link), and Special Ordinance C(xii)(without a link though it is online).

There, in the Schedule to Statute C (do keep up!), may still be found the old Statute U provisions about *Redundancy* and also '*Removal for incapacity on medical grounds*'. There, too, is Chapter V of the old Statute U, with its paragraphs on '*Grievance*', the second of which refers the enquirer to an unidentified Special Ordinance. The burrowing enquirer, finding his or her way to Special Ordinances under Statute C will find a motley collection, including the Cycle for the nomination of Proctors, but persistence will lead to Special Ordinance C (xii).¹⁰ This is the final outcome of the proposed changes to the Grievance procedure brought to the Regent House as we saw above. A brand new item has now appeared, but is not referred to on the HR web page list. This is Special Ordinance C (xiii).¹¹ It deals with Appeals. It was approved by the Regent House as Grace 2 of 10 June 2015, under the rubric:

*'That the recommendation in paragraph 11 of the Joint Report of the Council and the General Board, dated 20 April and 17 April 2015, on proposed amendments to the process for appeal under the Schedule to Statute C in the case of non-confirmation of appointment (Reporter, 6383, 2014–15, p. 493) be approved.'*¹²

But it is cast far more broadly than that and far more

comprehensively than the Report presented to the Regent House for Discussion included. In effect it replaces the former requirement that a University Officer appealing against a disciplinary penalty short of a decision of the University Tribunal (for which the Septemviri is the Court of Appeal) should use the Grievance procedure. Schedule to Statute C, III, 2, still stipulates that a person facing an oral or written warning must appeal against the warning by following the procedure laid down pursuant to Chapter VI for the redress of a Grievance. But that requirement has not been replaced, despite the fact that the revised Grievance procedure, in force for some time now, contains nothing by way of appeal provisions except for those discontented with the outcome of their Grievance.

Now it could fairly be said that members of the Regent House should have read the Grace list carefully and checked that what they were agreeing to was what the rubric indicated, namely a change of provision for probationers who were not confirmed in their University Offices at the end of their period of probation. But only those who have occasion to keep up in any detail with legislative reforms could have found their way with any speed. It is not a trackless waste, for the record is there. But one would need a set of Ordinance Survey maps and a good GPS to get there with ease.

The Oxford proposals in the Appendix to the Supplement on Statute XII published with the *Gazette* of 19 November will I am sure present no such difficulties to members of Congregation anxious to be clear what they are asked to agree to and to glimpse where they may lead. And a far bigger constituency in Oxford stands to be affected by the proposed changes. In Cambridge only University Officers facing discipline, dismissal, redundancy and so on, or wishing to raise a Grievance, have to find what they need in their counterpart of Oxford's Statute XII. The vast majority of Cambridge's academic and academic-related staff lack even those residual protections derived from the Education Reform Act 1988 when academics lost old-fashioned tenure.

G.R.EVANS

¹ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2007-08/weekly/6119/17.html>

² <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2008-09/weekly/6157/26.html>.

³ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2009-10/weekly/6164/section1.shtml>, containing links to the preceding Green paper (January 2009) and White Paper (December 2008).

⁴ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2009-10/weekly/6171/section8.shtml>.

⁵ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2011-12/weekly/6267/section7.shtml>

⁶ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2011-12/weekly/6263/section7.shtml>

⁷ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2011-12/weekly/6242/index.shtml>.

⁸ Disciplinary action, Grievances and Appeals

⁹ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/hr/policy/Grievance/>.

¹⁰ http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2015/special_c-section1.html#heading2-15

¹¹ http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2015/special_c-section1.html#heading2-16

¹² <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2014-15/weekly/6390/section7.shtml#heading2-20>

¹³ http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2015/special_c-section1.html#heading2-16

¹⁴ <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2011-12/weekly/6242/section2.shtml#heading2-3>

REVIEWS

The editor regrets that the name of Nicholas Shrimpton was omitted at the end of his review, "Titian to Canaletto", in *Oxford Magazine* in Fifth Week.

Gang Slang Style

Julie Coleman, *the life of Slang*, 2015, OUP, £10.99



'SLANG,' wrote Eric Partridge, in his 1933 book with that title, '..is easy enough to use, but very hard to write about' before going on to fill over 400 pages on the subject. He is not alone: Jonathan Green's *Dictionary of Slang* (2010) runs to three hefty volumes and will set you back 350 *quid* or *smackers*. Green's earlier work about dictionaries and dictionary makers, *Chasing the Sun* (1996) has two weighty chapters on slang. By comparison, Professor Coleman's work, first published in 2012 and now available in paperback, looks like light relief.

Publishers are not famously charitable: they produce books in the expectation that *punters* or *suckers* will pay to read them—or, at least, to own them. Plainly, there must be some continuing fascination with the many varieties of slang, cant or informal language displayed and dissected in these works. But defining what is or is not 'slang' is, Julie Coleman notes, a 'slippery' task, as difficult as *nailing jelly to the wall*. Her first chapter, 'What is Slang?' concludes, 'there's no state of *slanginess* inherent in a word ..or a sense of a word'; it all depends on who is using the word and the situation in which it is used—Humpty Dumpty had the right idea. Dictionaries of slang, she suggests, can be 'equally unreliable' because of the shifty nature of their subject-matter: words once considered slang, like *tremendous*, meaning 'Excellent' (a usage traceable to 1812) are now labelled by lexicographers as 'standard' or 'informal'.

Earlier explorers of slang, like Green and Partridge, tended to place slang's origins in criminal or under-world speech, also once known as *cant*. Coleman puts less emphasis on this criminal heritage, more on exploring the different ways in which slang can be used, and the different kinds of people who use it. 'What really sets slang apart from standard English', she argues, 'is the way it functions in social contexts; communicating meaning is a secondary function: it's really for communicating attitudes and cementing friendships'. Slang is 'a badge of our loyalties and aspirations' and its use can also express our disdain for other parts of so-

ciety—those outside the charmed circle. You're not in the gang if you don't speak the slang.

Recent decades have seen unprecedented changes in the way slang is created. In the past, its main creators were generally adult (and male). Some may have been crooks, but most were unremarkable groups of people, who felt themselves to be apart, under pressure—'individuals with different backgrounds in a shared position at the bottom of a hierarchy'. Among examples cited are over-lapping working class, military or naval groupings—the poor bloody infantry of the First World War, the airmen of the Second, the latter's rich slang heritage including *brown jobs*, a derisive term for the former.

In the 21st century, however, Coleman argues that it is young people of all classes who create new lingos, differentiating themselves from the old, fuddy-duddy writers and speakers of 'proper' English. Today's slang, more abbreviated and perhaps even more impenetrable to the uninitiated than ever before, is a product of the flowering of popular culture on screen and radio in the last century. The universality of instant digital communications and the 'social' media has, Coleman writes, put 'unprecedented creative power' into the hands of young people. By contrast, the English public schools, credited with the 19th century introduction of the 'Oxford-er'—exemplified by *toggers* and *Magger Bagger**—would not, Coleman thinks, 'leap to mind as trend-leaders today'.

From whatever source, new words are entering the English language at an unprecedented rate: more of the words in use today are outside the dictionary than within, according to one former lexicographer who now runs a website devoted to tracking down the absentees (so perhaps not an entirely disinterested source). Julie Coleman's compilation, wide-ranging though it is, has by now been overtaken by the daily product of *nerds*, *rappers*, *cats* and others. No matter; this is a jolly little book, Coleman's style, although authoritative, more laid back than that of most of her predecessors. There are jokey pictures, too. *ROFL* (and *RCR***).

* *Torpids* and the *Master of Balliol*, for the benefit of non-Oxonian readers.

** Recommended Christmas Reading.

CHRIS SLADEN

Here and There

Oxford Chamber Music Society. Henschel Quartet: *Haydn, Schulhoff and Schubert*, 4 October; Ianthe Ensemble: *Ligeti, Franck, Brahms*, 15 November 2015. Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Richard Wagner: *Tannhäuser*, The Met Live in HD, The Phoenix Picturehouse, Oxford, 31 October 2015.

Vincenzo Bellini: *I Puritani*, George Frederic Handel: *Orlando*, Welsh National Opera, New Theatre, Oxford, 3, 4 November 2015.

OSJ Prom: *Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Mussorgsky*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 17 November 2015.



THE first of the season's Oxford Chamber Music Society's Sunday afternoon concerts was given by the Henschel Quartet on the 4th October. This string quartet launched its international career in 1995 and in the past decade has won many honours and given prestigious concerts including at the Vatican and at the court in Madrid makes annual appearances playing Stradivari instruments from the royal collection. Christoph and Monika Henschel, first violin and viola are the remaining founder members with now Daniel Bell (violin) and Mathias Beyer-Karlshøj (cello). Their playing is characterised by complete unity of sound and a deep dedication to the music.

They played three contrasted quartets, by Haydn, by a little known Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942) and one, among the greatest of them all, Schubert's last string quartet in G major (D887). The Haydn came over as a much more introverted work than usual, though not without some sardonic humour. It introduced us to the Herschel's serious style of playing, digging deep into the music. The Schulhoff String Quartet No 1 proved to be an eclectic neo-romantic work with strong jazz and folk influences. Extraordinary sounds were produced with the players doing strange things with their bows. The Quartet performed with laid-back straight-faced humour.

The performance of the Schubert G major Quartet was a rare musical experience commanding intense concentration from the audience. It was clear that the

Henschel played with complete authority in total mastery of every detail, making the case that this ranks with the late quartets of Beethoven with which it is contemporary. This was a different style of Schubert playing from that we are used to in Oxford with Priya Mitchell and friends at the Oxford Chamber Music Festivals striking a different balance between beauty of sound and dramatic intensity. Both equally give insight into Schubert's genius.

* * *

The second concert, on 15th November, was given by the Ianthe Ensemble, an unusual combination of horn, Anna Douglass, violin, Yuka Ishizuka, and piano, Maria Canyigueral. From the limited repertoire for horn trio they played works by Ligeti and Brahms. The other item in the programme was the Violin Sonata by César Franck.

The Ligeti Horn Trio is an intriguing work not easy to assimilate at first hearing. The extended first movement was followed by three shorter, then abruptly ending. The first caught the imagination. It came over as an intimate conversation between the feminine voice of the violin and the male voice of the horn with the piano occasionally joining in, ending with a brief coda with all three instruments in agreement. The references to Beethoven and to Brahms mentioned in the programme note were hard to detect.

It is a long time since I have either played or heard the César Franck Violin Sonata. It was very refreshing to hear it again in such an accomplished performance. They were in perfect accord with each other and with the music. What struck me on this occasion was how it looked back at early sonatas for these two instruments as a sonata for piano with violin, reflecting the composer's background as a keyboard player.

The Brahms Horn Trio also received a golden performance, exploring the whole range of sonorities of this combination of instruments. My only criticism was that the Trio of the Scherzo was rather slow. Technical difficulties were swept aside as it proceeded to the glorious climax of the last few pages.

This was an extremely enjoyable concert, well-worth venturing out on a blustery Sunday afternoon. The Ianthe proved themselves convincing ambassadors for their chosen music. The concert deserved a fuller house.

The 6th December concert by the Frith Piano Quartet will be reported next Term, as will Mozart's Clarinet Quintet and Schubert's Octet on 17 January, followed by the four remaining concerts in the series.

* * *

This live high definition transmission was of a revival of Otto Schenk's 1973 production of *Tannhäuser*. Magnificently played and sung, it came over, nevertheless, as al-

most a parody of what grand opera used to be. The characters, larger than life, for the most part looked like opera singers rather than inhabiting their roles; the elaborate traditional sets were in sharp contrast to the economy-driven Spartan scenery of today (with occasional wasteful extravagances). Likewise, the depiction of profane versus romantic love avoided all trace of the sexual explicitness to which modern performers are subjected. It was fun! (1973 was the year I saw the opera at Covent Garden, courtesy of British Railways' long defunct Music Line, with W. Kassel in the title role, Josephine Veasey as Venus and Jesse Norman Elizabeth, with Colin Davis conducting.)

The production has received only thirty-two performances in the forty-two years of its existence. In an intermission interview the present wardrobe mistress explained how the original costume designs of Patricia Zipprordt had been lovingly preserved and adapted to the shapes and sizes of successive casts.

The story of the opera conflates two tales of thirteenth century Germany. In one, the hero tears himself away from the pleasures of Venus but can only receive forgiveness by going on a pilgrimage to Rome. But he is refused absolution until such time as a pilgrim's staff bursts into leaf. This it does only on the intercession of his dead fiancé. In the other the hero competes for the hand of his beloved Elizabeth in a song contest with a rival. In the opera, which Wagner originally entitled *Der Venusberg* until it was pointed out to him that this had more specific connotations, *Tannhäuser* gets carried away in the song contest with his rival Wolfram, extolling the pleasures of Venus. Ostracised, he goes on the pilgrimage but, disappointed, he is on his way home tempted back to Venus. This is such a shock to Elisabeth that she passes away, enabling the redemptive miracle.

The performance was conducted by James Levine, frail after his absence but fully in command of the proceedings. He set a slow, portentous pace for the opening march, which was followed a lengthy ballet depicting a sanitised bacchanal on the pleasures of the Venusberg so that it was some time before we were introduced to the singers (too long for a gentleman in the row behind me who spent much of the time snoring). We meet Johan Botha in the title role and Michelle DeYoung (Venus) in symbolic embrace, both looking and sounding like old-fashioned opera stars, he wanting to leave, she reluctant to release him (DeYoung believing she had genuine feelings for him). Both appeared and sang as opera stars of a bygone age. Thus, *Tannhäuser* was corpulent rather than athletic, Venus voluptuous rather than sexy. Before the scene change to the Wartberg Hall of Song we heard the shepherd's song beautifully performed by soprano Ying Fang. Elisabeth, played by Eva-Maria Westbroek, now making her

name as, and looking the part of, a Wagnerian soprano following her sensational creation of the title role in *Anna Nicole* and an acclaimed Sieglinde in The Met's ill-conceived staging but musically great Ring cycle. Only Peter Mattei of the principals, playing Wolfram, with his slim and upright appearance looked out of place on the Wagnerian stage. He made up for this in his divine rendering of the hymn which is known beyond the world of opera as 'Oh star of Eve' sung in an attempt to console Elisabeth.

The remaining cast all made great contributions to the whole, though all dressed the same, so that it was difficult to distinguish individuals. The elaborate traditional sets, designed by Günther Schneider-Siemssen showed none of the tattiness often associate with long-standing productions. Where have they been stored over the last forty years? Wartberg's Hall of Song of Act II with a gallery of around ten trumpeters impressed particularly.

This production of *Tannhäuser* awakened feelings of nostalgia for production styles of the past. But things have moved on and now it must be regarded as a reminder of what we used to expect.

* * *

Welsh National Opera's annual visit to Oxford's New Theatre took place in the first week of November, this year not clashing with the Oxford-Lieder Festival. They brought three works linked by the theme of 'madness', two operas reviewed here and Sondheim's musical *Sweeney Todd*. The introduction of voice-amplified musical into the Company's repertoire was an innovation with questionable justification. If the intention was to bring new and younger audiences into the opera theatre, it was an undoubted success; if it was to bring new and younger audiences to opera it probably failed completely. The only way to achieve that is to put on unashamedly traditional productions of great operas and let the thrilling sound of unamplified voices make its own case. This is why we welcome visits of Ellen Kent's Opera International. It may not be over until the fat lady sings but one learns that the fat lady is worth waiting for.

The two operas seen on successive nights were Bellini's *bel canto* melodrama *I Puritani* and Handel's rarely performed masterpiece *Orlando*. The rather intemperate remarks about some recent WNO productions of the former was drafted before I watched the second. Thinking I would have to modify these remarks in view of the superb direction of *Orlando*, it was not until the interval that I realised that it was not a new production, as stated in the programme, but a revival of a 2011 Scottish Opera production with the original director Harry Fehr responsible for the revival.

* * *

Bellini's 1835 opera *I Puritani*, based indirectly on Walter Scott is set in 17th century Plymouth. Elvira, daughter of Puritan commander Valton has received special dispensation to marry Catholic Arturo Talbot with safe passage to leave. On their wedding day, Arturo uses the passage to aid Queen Henrietta (Enrichetta), widow of King Charles I, to escape custody, disguised in Elvira's wedding outfit. This, not surprisingly drives Elvira mad. She spends the rest of Act I, the whole of Act II and most of Act III in a state of madness, until just before the end when Arturo returns. They are reunited, Elvira is restored to sanity and the opera ends happily when the Puritans declare a pardon for all Royalists.

Welsh National Opera thinks it knows better: the opera is set in twentieth century Northern Ireland. Enrichetta is a suspected spy condemned to death. The reprieve comes too late to save Arturo from having his throat cut. The result is what has unfortunately become the hallmark of many recent WNO productions—dingy sets, shabby costumes, dim lighting. The opera just does not fit the Northern Ireland situation. Why can't the management engage directors dedicated to supporting what is in the score and the drama and not trying to impose their own agenda? What has happened to the likes of Peter Stein, André Serban (Serban directed a wonderful, *Puritani* in 1982 with Murphy, O'Neill and Gwynne), Katie Mitchell or even Leiser and Caurier?

The Company deserves better. Musically and vocally the performance was superb. Under Carlo Rizzi, recently announced as Conductor Emeritus, the orchestra was at its best notably with splendid playing from the brass section, and the chorus was in excellent form. Like all Bellini, *I Puritani* demands singers, particularly sopranos and tenors, of the highest calibre. We were very fortunate that the indisposed Barry Banks could be replaced at short notice by Alessandro Luciano in the role of Arturo. Luciano is a true *bel canto* tenor who confidently attacked all the highest notes in thrilling fashion and with fair success. Linda Richardson, Elvira, proves to have the power and stamina to sustain almost three hours of Bellini madness. The remainder of the cast was equally strong. Riccardo, Arturo's Protestant rival for Elvira's hand, was played by David Kempster. Impressive was the bass voice of Aidan Smith as the Protestant commander.

Orlando is one of Handel's best and, in his time, most successful operas. Way ahead of its time, it breaks the rigid *opera seria, da capo aria* format with duets, trios and ensembles. The production, directed by up and coming Harry Fehr, was originally for Scottish Opera. It relates the story of the soldier hero driven crazy by his inability to choose between resuming his military ca-

reer and his unrequited love for Angelica, whose life he has saved. Angelica loves Medoro, another soldier recovering from wounds, who is also loved by Dorinda. Presiding over all is the guru Zoroastro, who brings Orlando to his senses.

Complicated though they are, the plots of Handel's operas are so universal that directors can set them in any time or place and still be true to the composer. Originally given a pastoral setting with Dorinda a shepherdess, in this production we are in a military hospital with Dorinda a nurse tending Orlando, bipolar, suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, and Medoro with a leg wound; Zoroastro is the head of the clinic. It is as if we are watching an episode of *Holby City*. The sets, designed by Yannis Threvons, constantly changing from wards to treatment rooms, offices and particularly the reception area bear an uncanny resemblance to Oxford's Manor Hospital. A superfluous element is the occasional back-projection of video images presumably with some intended significance.

Within this staging the performance is stunning. Played as comedy, the ensemble acting has a Mozartian quality in delineating the relations between the characters. Two counter-tenors play Orlando and Medoro. Lawrence Zazzo takes the former role, created by the great castrato Seresino, and Robin Blaze the latter. Both perform effortlessly the vocal gymnastics demanded. The girls are played by WNO regulars Rebecca Evans (Angelica) and Fleur Wyn (Dorinda). The singing and acting of all was pure delight. In the third Act comedy comes close to tragedy when Orlando goes berserk attempting to kill Dorinda confusing her with the faithless Angelica, and setting the hospital on fire until subdued by Zoroastre with electric shock therapy after which he regains his sanity, dons his RAF uniform and prepares to set off for war.

A reduced orchestra with the addition of two theorboes attempts to produce a baroque sound under conductor Rinaldo Alessandrini. It provides adequate support for the singers while missing the precise dotted rhythms of Harry Bicket and The English Concert, whose concert version of *Orlando* can be heard in London and Birmingham on its world tour early next year.

The OSJ Prom at the Ashmolean of music arranged and conducted by John Lubbock on 17th November was given by the talented local Japanese pianist Maki Sekaya, with a thirteen piece band of players from the Orchestra of St John's. The Atrium with its perfect acoustics is no longer available for music so the concert was given in the long Randolph Sculpture Gallery where the acoustics are nearly as good.

The concert opened with four dances from the *Nutcracker Suite*. This was hugely enjoyable, enhanced by the unusual

timbre of the orchestra with six strings to seven wind. A feature was the marvellous flute playing of Alison Hayhurst, which, starting with incredible fortissimo at the beginning of *Danse de la Fée-Dragée*, was maintained throughout the concert. There followed *Five Preludes* by Sergei Rachmaninoff sensitively played by Maki Sekiya. Two were familiar, the rest less so. She opened with *Op 3; No 2 in C sharp minor*, the one everyone knows, played with extreme use of the pedal to give special effect. Then *Op 12; No 5* which I studied with Reginald Paul when still at school. (By association this brought back a terrifying long-buried memory of turning over for that pianist at a live BBC broadcast of a Beethoven Violin Sonata from a tatty score which kept collapsing and negotiating a cable-strewn floor to turn over from the violinist too!) The first half ended with a recent arrangement by Lubbock of a piano piece by Tchaikovsky, again with some divine flute playing.

The second half of the concert was devoted to Lubbock's arrangement for piano and orchestra of Mussorgsky's mammoth piano work *Pictures at an Exhibition*. This should rather be called an arrangement for orchestra with piano. Just as in Messiaen's *Turangalila Symphonie*, the piano is treated as part of the orchestra, its sound rarely distinguishable from the rest of the noise. This was a realistic tour round an art gallery. The Promenade started in a blaze of trumpet and horn and by the end, with increasing fatigue, reduced to a few strings. The pictures were individually and descriptively drawn by imaginative orchestration, and the tour ended in spectacular fashion with an exhilarating depiction of *The Great Gate of Kiev*.

The interval talk by Jon Whiteley was illustrated by Camille Pissarro: *The Tuilleries Gardens in rainy Weather* from the Museum's collections, the nearest one could come to Hartmann's *Tuilleries: Dispute d'enfants après jeux*, having none of that artist's paintings.

PETER SCHOFIELD

Not the Gazette

N.B. The *Oxford Magazine* is not an official publication of the University. It is a forum for the free expression of opinion within the University.

University History

John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago*, 2015, University of Chicago Press.



HISTORIES of single universities just get better and better. One of the earliest examples of this satisfying trend was, from the mid-1980s, Dyer's history of the University of Georgia; then came in the early-2000s Ives on the University of Birmingham—in which he perfectly illustrated the domination of the early civics by their lay-controlled Councils, where the Good Burgers of Birmingham point-blank refused the humble request of the Professors that Senate might meet in the splendid Council Chamber on the basis that its shiny new chairs were not to be besmirched by the hired-help in gowns! For a brief 1960s golden age (think Howard Kirk in Bradbury's 'The History Man') the lunatics were very clearly in charge of the asylum, but—as Halsey chronicled in his seminal 'Decline of Donnish Dominion'—the lay folk began to re-assert control from the time of the mid-1980s Jarrett Report and now most universities are managerial and corporatist, the voice of academics marginalised and ignored.

And so for 2015 we have Boyer on the University of Chicago, another historian (as with Dyer and Ives) doing a magnificent job of chronicling his home institution—he is the long-serving 'Dean of the College', the post heading up Chicago's delivery of undergraduate teaching. There was a first and failed UofC, dating from 1857; and then the successful one re-founded in the early-1890s, largely reliant initially on Rockefeller money. Throughout the 125 years or so of the second UofC there seems to have been a perpetual struggle between visionary, dynamic, and powerful (and sometimes rather less so) Presidents and a blinkered self-serving collective of rent-seeking faculty keen to avoid teaching undergraduates while focussing on graduates and research activity—despite the need for the latter to be heavily subsidised from the excessive tuition fees charged to the undergraduates (just as the £9000 fee in English universities does today). The same issue, of course, still plays itself out in modern US HE as an army of casual, underpaid and exploited, adjuncts props up undergraduate teaching (the fees for which increase even ahead of US medical inflation)—while the privileged fat-cat tenured profs teach ever fewer hours and only on their favoured angel located within a very tiny part of the discipline's pin-head.

Thus for long periods the College was 'neglected, under-resourced, or treated as a lesser priority'. Indeed, in the 1950s the selfish faculty came close to achieving their dream of terminating undergraduate education, thereby making the UofC a

sort of gigantic lakeside All Souls. Undergraduate numbers fell and the loss of fee income brought the University close to insolvency—and the missing undergraduates from those years still impact of the UofC's fortunes today in that they never became well-heeled alumni now dropping off the perch and leaving legacies for the revered alma mater. Only by the 1980s did the UofC even begin to address the limited size of its undergraduate activity relative to its peers—with faculty's unrealistic reaction being, as ever, 'divided and divisive' as many 'preferred a top-heavy doctoral university' (no matter that it was financially unsustainable), leading to great bitterness ('dyspeptic fears among senior faculty') expressed in a 'crescendo of rumors' and the need eventually for the Board of Trustees to inject common-sense in ruling that undergraduate numbers would indeed be expanded. The result is today's 'large, thriving undergraduate college' as 'unpleasant realities' were faced and 'fundamental change' was at last achieved.

Boyer ends, as one might perhaps expect from the Dean of the College at the UofC, with a plea for faculty to take seriously their undergraduate teaching duty: to create 'a community defined by the high value of teaching on all levels and at all times... [and such a] commitment to teaching informed by research is perhaps the best defence against critics who decry the foibles of contemporary higher education' (for that crescendo of criticism see Palfreyman & Tapper (OUP, 2014), 'Reshaping the University: The Rise of the Regulated Market in Higher Education'). Thus, universities have to 'recognize that supporting distinguished teaching and fashioning coherent curricula for their students must be among their highest priorities, as opposed to allowing their faculty to become agents of fragmentation in the name of 'research excellence'—which, while appealing in itself, weakens the fundamental mission of teaching and thus of a great university.'

It is especially depressing and salutary to be reminded that much-needed change in academe often requires the leadership energy of a strong President or Vice-Chancellor and/or the decisiveness of the lay majority as the ultimate controlling entity, and rarely emerges from the professional initiative and collegial consensus of a self-interested dondom biting bullets and tackling weaknesses.

One can only hope that over the coming decades the prime charitable objective of the Oxford colleges as undergraduate teaching machines will keep them on track as a vital counter-balance to the University's academic departments' natural tendency to steal resources from undergraduate teaching so as to pursue the cash and kudos of research. But, as CUFs are down-graded into ULs and as academics' priorities become (in Boyer's words) 'agents of fragmentation', one would not wish to bet even one's rapidly devaluating

USS pension that the colleges will not yet end up as glorified halls of residence, their endowment income suffering Wilson-style levels of sur-tax so that it can be redirected to fund the Bunsen-burners and Van der Graf generators of costly Oxford Big Science. Perhaps such a fate will be avoided only by lay involvement—not as lay governors since we eschew such, but via the impact of lay alumni demanding the protection of The Oxford Tutorial in return for their donations and legacies?

DAVID PALFREYMAN

Banging on about poetry

Simon Armitage, 'A Parable of the Solicitor and the Poet'. Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Poetry, 24 November 2015.



YEARS ago I attended a poetry reading by Simon Armitage in Blackwell's. There were about 30 people there. An audience 'fit though few'—although actually they weren't all fit. This was when he told us that at a school reading the teacher had asked if there was going to be any 'language' in the poems. He read 'Hitcher'. It's about a man who gives a lift to a Bob Dylanish hippy in a Vauxhall Astra then hits him with the krooklok 'on the top road out of Harrogate' and pushes him out of the car. Armitage: 'It is a fiction; it was actually an Audi.' How things change!

The collective mind of Oxford had decided this was an event it absolutely *had* to be at, so that when I arrived fifteen minutes before time I was shunted into an overflow room with hundreds of others. We decided it would be absurd to stand up when the Vice-Chancellor arrived, as absurd as Alf Garnett standing up naked in his bath when the National Anthem was played on the wireless in the film *Till Death Do Us Part* (1969). So we didn't. Needless to say there were glitches in seeing and hearing Armitage virtually, just as there were glitches in the poems projected by his power-point system—which in any case those in the overflow room could not see. All very comforting for technophobes like me. And Armitage must be a bit of a technophobe himself, because he does not like Kindle with its 'non-combustible fire'.

Lucy Newlyn has expressed well-argued reservations about the wonky election process for the Professorship of Poetry ('Time for Electoral Reform: The Professorship of Poetry', *Oxford Magazine*, No. 363), but in this case the system has picked a winner. This lecture was up with the best I have heard over the decades (Wystan Auden, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, Roy Fuller, John Wain, John Jones (remember him?), Peter Levi, Seamus Heaney, James Fenton, Paul Muldoon, Christopher Ricks, Geoffrey Hill). It was extraordinarily dense and packed, and with no shortage of dry wit and wide-ranging allusion. Serena Williams, the head-butting Zin-

edine Zidane and Marco Materazzi mixed with Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire.

Armitage announced that his theme as Professor was to be about the status and condition of poetry in our time. He looked forward to his last lecture in Trinity Term 2019, at which point some members of the audience would have high-paying executive jobs 'in the nose-cone of the Gherkin', would be flying over Oxford in the first class of some plane ('where the seats are slightly wider and the crew is slightly more obliging') and looking down would say, 'I wonder if he's still there, banging on about it.'

There were two main concerns in this inaugural: the place of poetry in our society and the way in which poetry operates when we actually see and hear it. The meaning of the title soon became apparent: Armitage imagines a poet's solicitor who lands the poet with lots of poems written in green ink. They are full of cliché and sentimentality, and the product of undisciplined self-expression. There are mountains of such poetry in our society, and it's probable that more people are writing poetry than reading it. A lot of it is appalling. It is sincere, but that does not guarantee that it will be any good. The day of Armitage's lecture the *Daily Telegraph* published a piece of incompetent doggerel about the cinemas banning an advert in which the Lord's Prayer featured. It didn't scan properly; this stuff never does.

In his Bateson Lecture 'The Reas'ning Engine: Poetry versus Philosophy' (2007) Peter Porter inveighed against the merciless ubiquity of such botched work. And yet, and yet... Poetry is relentlessly neglected and marginalised. Armitage found himself in a Smith's in Liverpool (the Cultural Capital in 2008), where there was not a single poem or book of poetry in the shop, among all those magazines which could feature in *Have I Got News For You* (such as *Wood Turning* and *Practical Pig Keeping*). Andrew Motion has said, 'At the moment, if you're seen reading poetry in a train, the carriage empties instantly.' Wendy Cope's poet Strugnell recalls this as he reads Motion on the train: 'A few choice bits from Motion's new anthology/ And you'll be lonelier than any cloud. / This stratagem's a godsend to recluses/ and demonstrates that poetry has its uses.'

This neglect of and antipathy to poetry can be seen in films. Armitage cited the case of *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (but think of anyone going to see that !) where poetry produces 'scowls and yawns.' And there is *Se7en* (1995), where five seconds into the towering classic of European literature David Mills (Brad Pitt) yells, 'Fuckin' Dante!... poetry-writing faggott! Piece of shit! Motherfucker!' Armitage did warn us that there would be 'language'. Actually I don't think Dante was a faggott, and in canto XV of *Inferno* we find the sodomite Brunetto Latini consigned for punishment. And there is Shaw's *Man and Superman*, where Mendoza makes poetry sound just absurd with a repetitive riff to the effect that 'Mendoza adores thee.'

This neglect and hostility, however, runs alongside media interest when there is a poetry story, such as the recent fracas at the Poetry Society, 'an in-house industrial dispute.'

And Armitage cited the case of the weird-looking Will Gompertz (my view, but I'm sure Armitage would concur) popping up on television to report on Larkin being given 'a berth' in Westminster Abbey so that he could sleep for eternity and be 'canonised with the best of them.' There is National Poetry Day, alongside World Animal Day, prizes which are the equivalent of *Britain's Got Talent*, and lists in *The New York Times*, where poetry is spoken of in the same breath as John Grisham and Jeffrey Archer, but none of it does any good. It's all hopeless. There are little pockets, such as poetry-readings at festivals.

My view is that more venues should be given to poetry in the media. It can creep up upon one, and slip down like a slippery sweet if presented properly. There used to be an excellent late-night poetry slot on television (spoilt, of course, by inappropriate images). Carol Ann Duffy's superb poem 'Last Post' read by Jeremy Irons at a Westminster Abbey Armistice Day service in 2009 is an example of where a poem can grace a public occasion. But the poem has to be good, of course. It's a long time ago now, but Armitage cited the case of Douglas Dunn's *Elegies*, which, amazingly, won the Whitbread Prize in 1985 not just for the best book of poetry but for the best book.

That prize is now the Costa Prize: as Armitage tartly observed the tavern has transmogrified to the coffee house. Armitage looked at the 'unusual approachability' of one of Dunn's poems, and demonstrated that he is a superb close-reader of poetry. He earned his Trades Union ticket. I met Dunn once, and he recited to me a poem he had written which was also approachable: 'You're not as tall as De Gaulle,/ And Dewar is taller than you are.' (This is Donald Campbell Dewar, First Minister of Scotland (1937-2000)).

The obscurity of poetry often puts people off, and Armitage recalled the case of a school-friend who thought the golden plover in an exam poem was a car. Still, one could say that he had made the poem his own. I wonder what Armitage thinks about 'Hitcher' appearing on the Oxford Cambridge RSA exams as a piece to critique? I hope readers will realise that I am using critique as a verb ironically. Armitage said he had never been able to find that golden plover poem. I wonder whether it could have been Wilfrid Wilson Gibson's 'Golden plover' or his 'Prelude' which begins, 'As one at midnight wakened by the call/ Of golden plovers?' To allude to *Camino Real*, like many of his predecessors Armitage gave us the dictionary for a moment, pointing out the pluvial etymology of plover.

Armitage's range is admirably broad, with Caedmon and *Pearl* at one end, Rap Poetry at the other, and Milton in between. He gave a good analysis of Milton's 'Methought I saw my late espousèd saint'—a poem which Dr. Johnson thought 'a poor sonnet', 'proving that you can't always trust the judgement of Oxford-educated people.' He spent time with Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*—a very high-profile poem in the States, and read out this bit:

'Because of your elite status from a year's worth of travel, you have already settled into your window seat on United Airlines, when the girl and her mother arrive at your row. The girl, looking over at you, tells her mother, these are our seats, but this is not what I expected. The mother's response is barely audible—I see, she says. I'll sit in the middle.'

Armitage's relatively inexpressive mode didn't sink this concoction entirely, but listening between the lines one had the impression that he didn't think much of a poem which doesn't look like poetry on the page, so has managed to fly under the poetry-detecting radar of the anti-poetry brigade. He made it clear that his preference is for poetry which sounds good and can be performed, and put in a good word for the 'sonic and acoustic properties' of Kate Tempest's work. Print is only 'the warehouse' for poetry, which is about 'squeezed air' not ink.

He also referred to the 'self-referring cosmos' of the virtual world on the internet, admitting that much of it was 'like a dog whistle beyond my hearing.' He finished with a splendid reading of 'Elegy in Gold', which made us all want to go away and read it. Which is what a Professor of Poetry needs to do—after he has bewailed the fact that poets are no longer 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world', as Shelley put it, but simply 'unacknowledged'.

Armitage explained that living in remote Huddersfield he could enjoy his privacy, since it felt like being in 'a witness protection programme' there. He relishes the charm of local words. There is an apostrophe-less Slubbers Arms in Huddersfield (well-behaved dogs welcome), and it relates to the slab which is a fault in a thread. Armitage made a nice tribute to his predecessor Geoffrey Hill, who uses 'slub' in 'A Treatise of Civil Power' (2007) and provides an explanatory footnote. He quoted Keats in that letter from Winchester to John Hamilton Reynolds of 22nd September 1819: 'English ought to be kept up.' 'Kept up not propped up.' Poetry can play its part in this, and we have high expectations for the new Professor's forthcoming lectures.

BERNARD RICHARDS

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