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VARSITY

Intermitting students left abandoned

- **Revealed** Struggling students ineligible for benefits are left with no government support
- Lack of University aid compounds problems

Todd Gillespie and Siyang Wei

Students who take time out from studying have found themselves unable to claim financial support, leaving some in serious hardship, a *Varsity* investigation has discovered.

Over 200 Cambridge students a year 'intermit', taking temporarily leave from the University to recover from an "illness or other grave cause". Yet policy inconsistencies, unusually stringent tests for benefit eligibility, and limitations to available funds have left some intermitting students in dire financial straits – with many of them already struggling with serious health issues or a lack of financial support from family.

Intermitting students are classified as full-time students by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which often precludes their eligibility for state support, including out-of-work and means-tested benefits.

Compounding this, the policy of Student Finance England (SFE), which provides tuition and maintenance loans, is inconsistent with the DWP. SFE does not consider intermitting students to be full-time, and so withdraws any student loans and maintenance payments.

Students have accused the government of neglect, and argued that Cambridge colleges should pool resources to support intermitting students.

CUSU disabled students' officer

Florence Oulds condemned the gaps in government support, saying they show a "lack of understanding of how intermission works, but also of disabled students".

A spokesperson for the DWP did not respond directly to the findings of *Varsity's* investigation, offering to send information about benefits eligibility that is available online. The University declined to comment on *Varsity's* findings.

Except in exceptional circumstances, they are not eligible to claim income-related benefits unless they already claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP), a benefit for those with a serious long-term illness or disability.

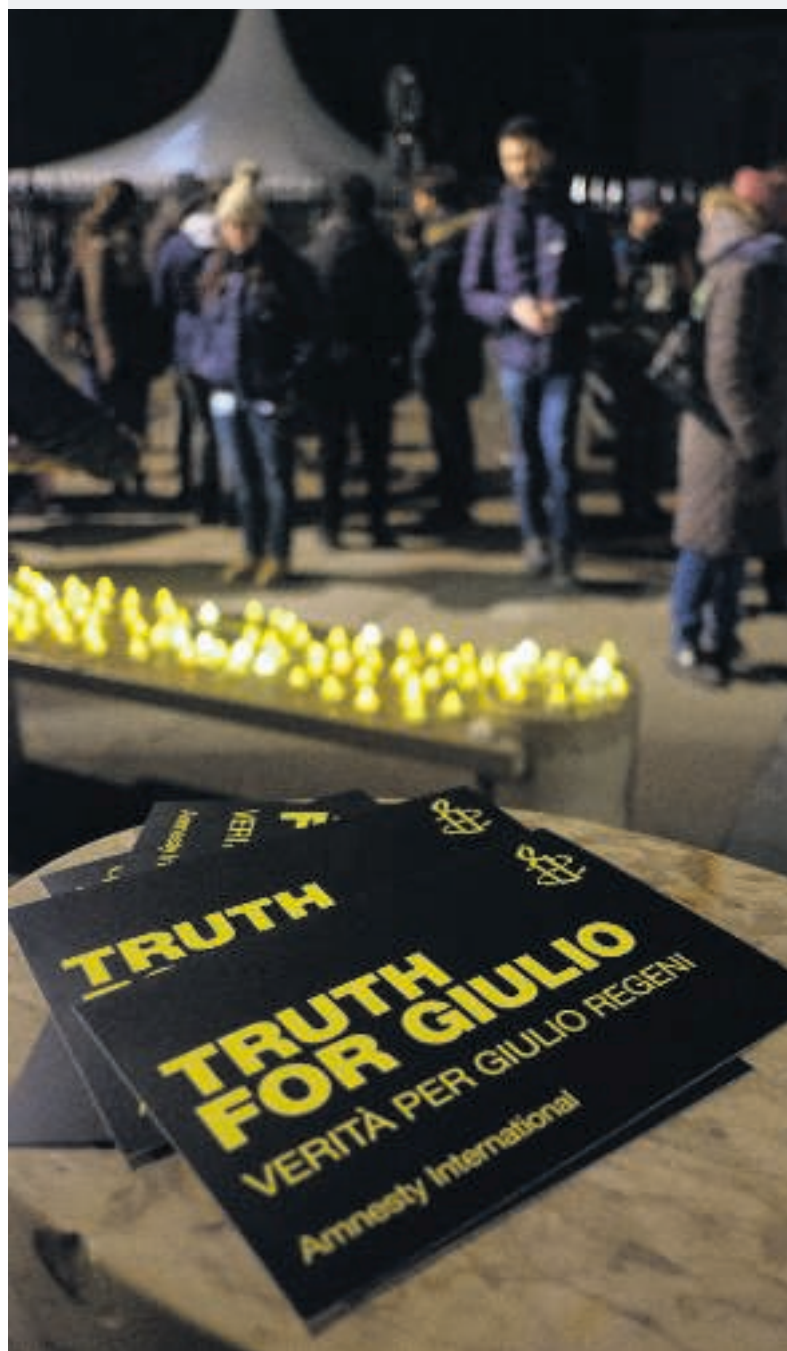
The criteria for PIP eligibility are extremely stringent, with the need to prove inability to complete basic tasks like "reading or communicating" and "washing, bathing or going to the toilet". This is far beyond the threshold required for non-students to claim other out-of-work benefits. The application process can also take several months, and only around half the claims are approved.

Students can only obtain most other benefits after the resolution of their reason for intermission.

Consequently, students who have intermitted due to ill health and are too ill to work but not eligible for PIP can be left, as one student described her experience to *Varsity*, in "penury".

Full story Page 6 ►

Two years on, still no justice Cambridge vigil for Giulio Regeni



A vigil for Giulio Regeni outside King's on Thursday

(MATHIAS GJESDAL HAMMER)

Don't ditch the student survey, Uni tells finalists

Edward Pinnegar
Senior News Correspondent

Cambridge's pro-vice-chancellor for education, Graham Virgo, has defended the merits of the National Student Survey (NSS), debating CUSU Education Officer, Martha Krish, and Matt Kite of Cambridge Defend Education (CDE).

The intervention by Virgo, in *Varsity* today, comes as the latest development in discussions – fraught with tension about the dangers, but also the potential importance, of students completing the survey – which have been ongoing since 2016.

CDE and CUSU have criticised the NSS, saying that participation in the survey will lead to higher tuition fees and the marketisation of higher education. On the other hand, Virgo argues that the survey "provides students with a voice" which allows the university to "identify and remedy areas of concern".

While Virgo believes fees to be "unfair and unjust", he writes that the NSS no longer affects them as directly because of a change in the law last year – a point that CUSU contests. He argues further that the publication of the results "helps prospective students from all backgrounds to make informed decisions" about applying to university, and that they are "used extensively" in the preparation of well-known league tables.

Remarkings on the extent of the survey's benefits, Virgo adds that the NSS has been useful in the monitoring of the "adverse effect of a heavy workload on student mental health", adding that students' feedback has been "invaluable".

What does the NSS mean? Page 11 ►
Should finalists boycott? Page 16 ►

Editorial

You're a failure. Congratulations

"The world is your oyster", they tell you.

Well, I don't know if you've ever eaten oysters, but they're actually pretty disgusting, and the process of making the world your own is similarly debasing.

Unless you're on some kind of integrated Masters or have a small loan of a billion dollars from your father, job applications are a necessary struggle for third-year undergrads. When you were young and just looking for a side hustle, applying for things was simple: avoid spelling errors, act polite, and give the vague impression that you're the kind of person who can be trusted with a pair of safety scissors.

But when you're contending with a thousand applicants for two places on an unpaid internship, things get more complicated. Vaguely phrased questions become closely scrutinised 'opportunities' to show your 'passion'; cover letters become sycophantic ramblings, clumsy attempts to seduce some bored HR dogsbody. At some point, being basically competent stopped being good enough.

There's no wonder this process is such torture for any sane person. These processes implore us to be narcissistic, to indulge in notions of our own brilliance. With this as the bar for entry into professional life, it's no wonder that much of our society seems to be run by delusional charlatans.

With every difficult skill – off-piste skiing, oil painting, processing income tax – there are people who excel at it, and this just as true for applications. For applications, it's probably the worst person you know: that slimy networker whose private school confidence and cold-eyed ruthlessness make up for their general mediocrity. This may be a stereotype, but its not without its justifications (especially in a place like Cambridge), and it often feels like this is the person that the world is trying to turn us into.

I'd like to say it'll get better – that the world is one big episode of *The Apprentice*, where the hubristic are smited down by a cosmic Lord Sugar. But sadly I think its more like *The Thick of It*, one big machine running on the collective delusion of fools, rolling on from one omnishambles to the next. Studies suggest that confidence, merited or not, is correlated with success in the workplace (by which I mean promotion, not high performance). I dare say that most women in elite professions are familiar with this phenomenon, seeing female peers under-promoted and under-paid by contrast with sharp elbowed dopes.

This doesn't paint a very cheery picture, I know. But pessimism can be good consolation. So next time you get a rejection letter from that publisher, or NGO, or investment bank, take solace in the fact that at least you aren't that guy.

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News

'Angry and frustrated' Staff prepare to strike after pension talks fall apart

After national-level talks collapse, Rosie Bradbury speaks to the staff preparing to walk out next month

"It's a genuinely painful moral situation for academics." So says Dr Sam James, a J. H. Plumb College Lecturer at Christ's and the current vice-president of the Cambridge University and College Union (UCU). James spoke to *Varsity* in a personal capacity on the conflicting sentiments of reluctance and determination felt by academics in the reality of a pensions strike.

After talks with university advocacy group Universities UK (UUK) reached a deadlock on Tuesday, the UK's largest higher education union has announced that strikes over pension changes "look like a reality" in 61 institutions nationwide, including the University of Cambridge. The official announcement of when and where strikes will occur is expected on Monday, after details such as reading weeks are finalised.

The method of "escalating strike action" would begin with a two-day walk-out on February 22nd and 23rd, followed by blocks of strikes that will last up to five days. The strikes are expected to take place over the course of four weeks, with a total of 14 teaching days of industrial action. They will occur alongside actions 'short of a strike', including lecturers refusing to cover classes, do voluntary work, or reschedule classes lost on strike days. Cambridge UCU expects that an estimated 800 staff are likely to participate.

"[Academics] are acutely conscious that it's not just a relationship between their employer and their employer's profits, but it's also a relationship between the students' education," said Dr. James on the prospect of strikes. While he was certain that every union striker would "make every effort" to avoid serious dam-

age to the student body, he remarked: "it's a very difficult balance."

Lectures taught or covered by non-union members or those not on strike will go ahead during the period of industrial action, as well as any college-based teaching such as supervisions. Because college teaching officers are paid by individual Cambridge colleges which do not have a stake in national negotiations, union members are only legally capable of withdrawing their labour from their teaching and research paid for by the university.

Whether yearly examinations will

A strike in stats

89.4%

Number of voting Cambridge UCU members who backed strike action

800

Estimated number of staff who will walk out next month

14

Expected number of days of strike action, starting in February



include material missed during days of strike is unclear, given that Cambridge examinations are written by individual faculties.

A University of Cambridge spokesperson said it is "committed to providing all of its staff with access to the best pensions it can."

"The University is considering a range of cautionary measures to minimise any disruption to its day-to-day operations."

Representatives from UCU and UUK attempted to negotiate a compromise this week over staff pensions in an effort to avoid strike action. The talks have stalled, however, with neither side willing to concede, and the UUK having dismissed further talks.

The UCU call for strike action followed the results of a nationwide ballot in which UCU members voted overwhelmingly in support of industrial action over pension reforms. Cambridge UCU members voted with 89.4% in favour of potential strike action and 95.8% in favour of action short of a strike, with a 57.5% turnout across the University. Dr James views the ballot support for strike action as reflective of "how angry and frustrated [members] are about the scale of degradation" in pension values.

The strike action is in response to a proposal put forward by the UUK to replace defined benefit pension schemes for incomes under £55,000 with defined contribution schemes. The value of the defined contribution fund depends on stock market performance of the underlying investments, rather than the guaranteed retirement income provided in defined benefit schemes. The UCU has criticised defined contribution schemes as riskier and less generous, citing anal-

News



ysis by actuarial consultants First Actuarial that staff could be as much as £200,000 worse off than under defined benefit schemes.

The UUK argues that replacing defined benefit schemes with defined contribution schemes is a necessity, citing a £12.5bn deficit in the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), the pension scheme until 1992. The UCU disputes this figure as pessimistic.

CUSU Council voted on Monday in support of a motion which backed any industrial action taken by university members, and which encouraged students to join staff in February.

Cambridge UCU told *Varsity* that they are “optimistic” that a strike will prevent the implementation of a defined contribution scheme, yet Eleanor Blair, a Computer Officer in the Department of Engineering, described her feelings as “hopeful, rather than optimistic”. Having previously been on the Cambridge UCU Committee and participating in past strikes, Blair said: “it’s hard to be optimistic when we’ve failed previously.”

There is a sense of culmination in a pensions dispute that dates back to 2011, when the USS changed from pension contributions calculated using an employee’s final salary earned prior to retirement, to the average salary earned over the course of their career. Dr James characterises the latest change, in not providing staff with a guaranteed income in retirement, as the “final straw”.

James also considers the switch to defined contribution schemes as a means for the university employers to individualise risk in order to place themselves in a more secure financial position, especially in an economic climate where employers are less certain of the long-term returns

from stock market investments.

A possible outcome from the changes to the pensions scheme may be lessened demand to enter the higher-education sector, particularly at pre-1992 universities under the USS. Blair told *Varsity* that IT staff, whose skills are more easily transferable across sectors, may “feel less loyal to universities in general if [they] feel like [employers] are not putting as much money into staff as they could be, or as they previously have been”.

The fight over changes to academics’ pensions has also come to light as criticism over vice-chancellors’ wages exceeding an ‘acceptable range’ has

▲▼ Dr Sam James (above) and Eleanor Blair (below) both supported strike action

(DANIEL GAYNE)

“It just doesn’t feel very fair”



reached fever pitch. “It just doesn’t feel very fair,” says Blair in describing her reaction to “shocking headline figures”.

Blair described a “mood of determination” among her colleagues, where growing frustration over pensions overrules a general reluctance to disrupt students’ education. Similarly, Dr. James argued that “academics have been asked, on pensions specifically, to make real compromises, and each time it’s been presented as a kind of unavoidable compromise”. For Cambridge staff, he said, the only alternative to strike action seems to be “to accept an unacceptable proposal”.

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Classicist Mary Beard immortalised in Lego by Instagrammers

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▲Model Mary (LEGO CLASSICISTS)

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Western misconceptions of Africa

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Can drugs cheats be defended?

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News

Vigil held two years after Regeni death

Patrick Wernham
Associate Editor

GREAT ST. MARY'S – Cambridge gathered on Thursday evening to remember one of its own – Giulio Regeni, a PhD student murdered in Egypt two years ago, and still no one held responsible.

Roughly 150 students, academics, and other residents of the city congregated outside Great St. Mary's church at 7.30pm to commemorate the two-year anniversary of the disappearance of Regeni, whose tortured body was found just over a week later. Regeni was in Egypt researching trade union movements when he was murdered, and despite many accusing the Egyptian state of being responsible for the killing, no one has been charged.

King's Parade has seen its fair share of protests and rallies over recent years, but at an event to remember the brutal murder of a Cambridge student, the mood was unsurprisingly more sombre.

Chairperson of the University Amnesty International group, Laura Bates, began proceedings by thanking those who turned up and inviting them to join her in a minute's silence. The silence began at 7.41pm, the time of the last contact with Regeni on the 25th January 2016.

Following the reading of a short poem by Pablo Neruda, Cambridge MP Daniel



(MATHIAS HAMMER)

Zeichner acknowledged that many of the crowd would have been at the same event this time last year, and called the lack of progress "a disgrace".

"I am absolutely determined that we keep on pressing to find out what happened," he added.

Alex Mayer, MEP for the East of England, noted that she had been at a similar event with her European colleagues: "There are truly shocked people from right across Europe" she said.

The vigil ended on a hopeful note,

with Italian student Mario Avesani saying that far from seeing it as a sad day, those present should take cheer from the fact they were standing collectively to call for justice.

"We are doing this together," he argued, before performing a short trumpet piece that prompted some in the crowd to start singing along.

The event was timed to coincide with similar gatherings in public spaces across Italy, where Regeni was originally from. In Rome alone, there were seven

separate vigils.

The two-year anniversary of Regeni's murder has seen a renewal in the efforts to bring his killer(s) to justice. Earlier on Thursday, Zeichner spoke out in parliament to ask what the British government was doing to push the case forward.

Saying that the case called into question "very basic academic freedoms", Zeichner went on to ask "what the Government is doing to mark the event and also what pressure is being exerted on the Egyptian Government to find the truth about what happened to Giulio."

The Cambridge city branch of Amnesty International will on Friday be meeting with the MEP for Regeni's home region in Italy, Isabella de Monte, to discuss the future of the campaign to bring his killers to justice.

The University tweeted its support, saying in a post: "On the second anniversary of his disappearance, we remember Giulio Regeni – Cambridge scholar, colleague and friend. Our thoughts are once again with his family, who we join in demanding truth for Giulio."

The University has come under repeated criticism in the Italian media for an alleged lack of cooperation with the investigation. Irrespective of the veracity of these claims, on this evening's evidence it would be entirely unfair to claim that Cambridge is not interested in finding justice for Regeni.



Fairytale of Newn walk

After a sprinkling of snow on Sunday, one Newnhamite's photo made the front page of Reddit



(HANNAH JONES/
MATHIAS HAMMER)

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YOU WILL
YOU DID
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News

Revealed Intermittent students are being financially abandoned

- Intermittent students, still considered full-time students, cannot withdraw government payments
- A lack of centralised support compounds issues and can worsen student health

Todd Gillespie
Senior News Editor
Siyang Wei
Deputy News Editor

As part of our investigation, *Varsity* spoke to two students who intermitted and subsequently found themselves in extreme financial difficulty, unable to claim government support and left without funding from the University or their colleges.

“Impeded by the stress”

Sarra Facey, a mature student at King’s College, intermitted in 2012 under pressure from her College after the first year of her modern languages degree.

She was not financially supported by family during her studies, receiving a maintenance grant and special support grant from Student Finance England (SFE), as well as a Cambridge bursary. Upon intermission, she was no longer eligible for the bursary, and SFE paid her 60 days of ‘discretionary funding’ before ceasing payments.

Facey had been receiving Income Support prior to beginning her studies, and had assumed she would be able to claim this again when intermitting. However, welfare reform had made her ineligible to reapply. She tried to work, but was not well enough and was fired.

For the first year and a half, Facey made continuous attempts to access financial support, writing multiple letters to the DWP and contacting an MP about the issue. She said: “[The MP] basically said that he’d checked out the situation with the Secretary of State’s office and that they were happy with the rule.”

“Which is to say that it’s totally fine to condemn intermitting students to penury if they fall between ‘too ill to work but not ill, disabled, or ‘lucky’ enough to be awarded PIP.”

In May 2014, Facey’s partner wrote to the tutorial staff at King’s, informing them of the situation and asking if they would be able to offer any financial or administrative support.

“I am writing to let you know, because I am not sure you are aware of it, about the financial bind in which intermitted students can find themselves,” she wrote, explaining that intermitting students are not supported by Student Finance, but are ineligible for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) while registered as a student if they are not



▲ **Sarra Facey described her problems after intermitting**
(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

receiving PIP.

She added that Facey’s “ability to prepare well for return to study and prioritise her recovery” were “being significantly impeded by the stress of struggling for basic income”.

“It is very tiring and frustrating, and we are frustrated and tired.”

The financial tutor at King’s at the time, Tim Flack, responded two weeks later, writing that although the College appreciated the difficulty of Facey’s financial hardship, they were only willing to offer financial support to students who were currently studying there – not intermitting students.

He suggested other possible sources of funding – including application for state benefits, despite the lengthy explanation included in the original email.

Facey did apply to return in October

“It’s very tiring and frustrating”

What can intermitting students claim?

Intermitting students are normally classed as full-time students by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which makes claiming benefits very difficult. Meanwhile, they are ineligible for financial assistance from Student Finance England (SFE).

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Intermittent students can only claim ESA if they are eligible for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Standard allowance for under-25s: £57.90 per week, rising after 13 months.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) PIP claimants must pass a strict test to prove they have difficulty with mobility or basic daily tasks.

This has replaced Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Standard allowance: £22 - £141.10 per week, depending on severity.

Universal Credit This is currently being phased in to replace benefits

including Housing Benefit, Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), and Employment Support Allowance (ESA). For a full-time student to apply for Universal Credit one of the following must apply:

- You live with your partner and they are eligible for Universal Credit
- You are responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple, if both of you are students
- You are disabled and entitled to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and have limited capability for work

Standard allowance for single under-25s: £251.77 per month

Housing Benefit, Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), and Income Support These can be claimed only after the reason for intermission (often physical or mental illness, or disability) has been resolved, and only for up to one year. Claimants must also not have more than £16,000 in savings.

You cannot claim Income Support if you are eligible for JSA or ESA.

Allowance rates vary depending on severity of circumstance.

2014, and was set an exam on a language module in which she says she had “scraped a pass” in her first year. Although she narrowly passed the module again, she was deemed ineligible to return by a new senior tutor and was forced to drop out altogether.

She says that her financial hardship had a significant impact on her eventual withdrawal. She fell into debt and struggled to pay her rent, unable to find suitable paid work. “I lacked the time and energy to even get close to making sure I could meet my conditions for returning to the degree,” she added.

Facey also inconsistent support between colleges, saying: “Some colleges may have looked after vulnerable students who’ve intermitted instead of neglecting them like mine did.”

“It’s all so dependent on who holds the power and whether they decide to help you or not — which obviously is influenced by whether they understand your situation at all, for a start, which, if they think everyone has a home and financial support to go back to, they obviously don’t.”

Varsity contacted Tim Flack, now senior tutor at King’s. While he was unable to comment on Facey’s case, he said that intermitting students should be “treated in the same way” as non-students, and insisted that his college does provide support for intermitting students whom they expect to return, but that “the wider responsibility belongs to the government”.

“Belittled and brushed aside”

Varsity spoke to another student, who wished to remain anonymous as their case is ongoing.

The student, who is transgender and uses gender-neutral pronouns, applied to intermit in May 2017, largely due to mental health problems and fatigue. They said that their attempts to access financial support before intermitting were not treated seriously, also citing the lack of trans-friendly welfare and

teaching support, including the use of the correct name or pronouns, as a contributing factor to their difficulties.

“It was just more than I had the ability to cope with,” they said. “It was a consistent theme that my problems would be belittled and brushed aside. It felt like they didn’t want to make space for me.”

“The feeling I got from the University was that my mental health problems were just like a broken arm,” they added. Eventually, they were pushed to intermit after failing several exams and feeling unable to cope with the build-up of work.

They rent private accommodation all through the year, and are no longer in contact with their family. While studying, they had been receiving a full University bursary of £3,500 per year, but are no longer eligible to receive this during intermission.

Having initially intended to find a job, they attempted to claim benefits when their condition worsened; the Citizens’ Advice Bureau advised that they would be able to claim several.

They applied for Housing Benefit in late August, using a letter from their director of studies confirming ‘intermission for health reasons’. The Housing Benefit claim was rejected, citing DWP rules that intermitting students are still classed as full-time students unless they have completely abandoned their course. Their Council Tax Reduction claim, meanwhile, was rejected on the basis that they are no longer a full-time student. They are currently appealing this decision.

In late October, with rent and bills due imminently, they attempted to seek help from their college staff. They sent an email explaining their situation, asking if there were any college funds for which they could apply. Their director of studies responded: “I’m not sure there’s any funding source for students who are intermitting.”

In the following months, they attempted to work but were later hospitalised. In early January, they again appealed to their college, asking if there was any way to circumvent the student registration rule without having to quit their course, but were told this was not possible.

“While I agree that I am not well enough to study, intermission as a solution was a way of the University rejecting responsibility for my wellbeing,” they said. “I am caught in a place where neither the government nor the University wants to accept responsibility for my wellbeing while I am unable to support myself.”

The student is currently preparing to apply for PIP. They have attempted to apply twice before, but struggled to gather evidence in the timeframe given. Despite the lengthy application process and the stringent requirements, they are hopeful that a recently-obtained formal mental health diagnosis will help with their new application. Referring to PIP’s reputation for disregarding mental health issues, they also described themselves as “somewhat lucky” to also have problems with physical mobility

CUCA set to host tobacco lobbyists

Elizabeth Shaw
Senior News Correspondent

Cambridge University Conservative Association (CUCA) will be hosting a political pressure group against tobacco control activity, named FOREST, at the Robert Graham cigar shop on February 10th this term.

FOREST, short for Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco, receives 96% of its funding from the UK tobacco industry and campaigns against what it deems the 'denormalisation' of tobacco. Branding itself as a "voice and friend of the smoker", the lobbyists communicate with politicians and the media, using platforms such as Twitter to call for an end to the "stigmatisation of smokers".

In its term-card, CUCA invites its members to "Find out more about different pressure groups with FOREST!".

Connor MacDonald, the CUCA chairman for Lent 2018 told *Varsity*: "While the Association does not necessarily endorse the views of FOREST, we appreciate the dangers of regulatory overreach and want to hear the perspectives of groups

on the front line against it.

"The event in question is primarily social and aims to provide our members with free cigars should they so wish to smoke them (we have judged that this is something that our membership in general would quite like)."

MacDonald insisted: "Lobbying is an important component of democratic political processes and our members are adults capable of making informed and reasoned judgements. There is no compulsion to attend.

"As such, CUCA is committed to open and free debate and we will endeavour to explore controversial but important areas of discussion, of which this is one."

His comments were supported by Vice-Chairman of the association, Dylan Coll-Reed, who issued a unanimous statement.

In a statement released to *Varsity*, FOREST said: "Forest neither promotes nor encourages smoking. We support freedom of choice and personal responsibility, which is quite different. Tobacco is a legal product enjoyed by millions of adults. The health risks are well-known and we support all reasonable measures designed to discourage children from



smoking.

"Once you're 18, however, you are an adult and old enough to make informed choices about all sorts of things, including smoking and drinking. The idea that students should join a moral crusade

▲ **Robert Graham Whisky and Cigar Shop on Sussex Street**
(MATHIAS GJESDAL HAMMER)

against smoking is a chilling reminder of the evangelical temperance movement of the early 20th century. Do we really want to go back to that?

"I was delighted to accept CUCA's invitation to talk about Forest's work, not least because it sounds like an enjoyable evening. Smoking and the nanny state are issues that divide opinion so I'm looking forward to a lively discussion. Forest is non-party political so if the Labour Club or Liberal Association want to invite us to address them too they only have to ask! Our message to members of CUCA and other political groups is simple.

"Most important, join Forest in our fight against the intolerant, narrow-minded puritans who want to stifle debate on this and other lifestyle issues. You're at Cambridge, for God's sake. Listen to all sides of the argument and make up your own minds."

CUSU Ethical Affairs Officer, Dylan Amin, told *Varsity*: "While there is nothing we can do to prevent this association between CUCA and FOREST, we are surprised to hear of its existence.

"The arguments for tobacco control are coherent, powerful and backed up intensely by research, encouraging CUSU to be in support of it. For the environmental, social and moral good of the society our students live in, we condemn FOREST's work, making us thoroughly disappointed by this event."

Other upcoming events this term include a proposed visit from the controversial Eurosceptic Tory Jacob Rees-Mogg on February 8th, alongside regular 'Port and Policy' meetings.

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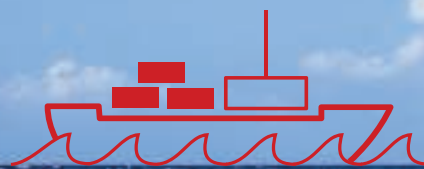
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CUSU budget review produces limited light

Catherine Lally
Senior Investigations Editor
Louis Ashworth
Editor-at-Large

CUSU began its attempt to escape financial woe this week, revealing limited information about its ongoing expenditure in an effort to boost transparency and accountability.

Broad positives for the struggling student union, including a cut to its projected losses this year, were marred by a semi-public scrap with CUSU-funded paper *The Cambridge Student* (TCS) and a muted reception at Monday's Council.

Using year-to-date expenditure statistics, CUSU reassessed its predicted losses for this year: expected now to be in the region of £70,000 including savings, possibly falling even more once the

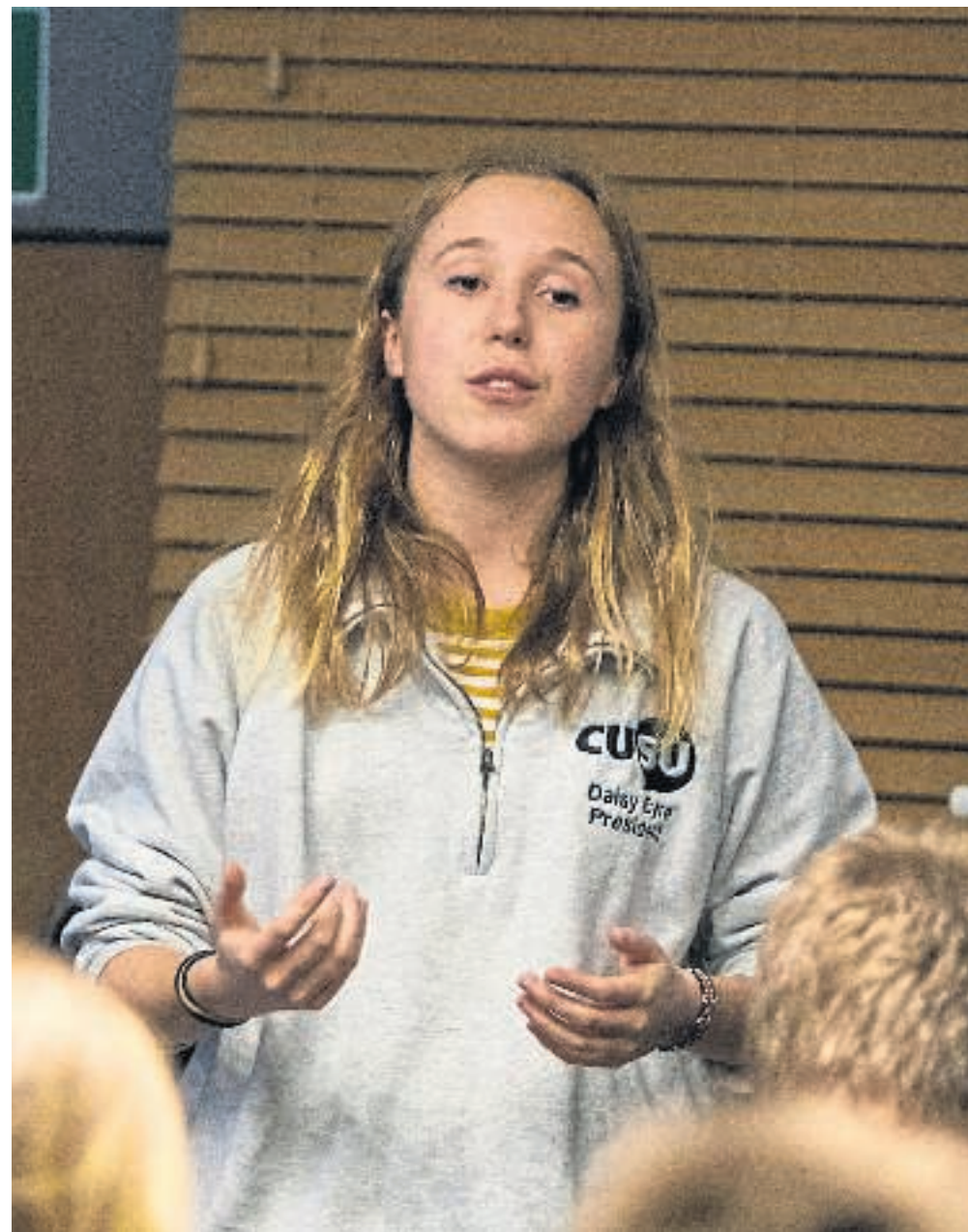
“
There was
a communication
issue between TCS
and CUSU
”

student union receives additional funding from the central University.

CUSU's attempt to give an appearance of belt-tightening, however, was marred slightly by the context of those savings. The most substantial overall saving made was to its expenditure on affiliation to the National Union of Students (NUS). CUSU has been charged just £250 so far this year – it had budgeted to pay £10,527.

At Council on Monday, where the figures were presented, CUSU president Daisy Eyre expressed apparent surprise at the saving. She told *Varsity* on Thursday that CUSU “routinely make it clear to the NUS that our budget is small compared to other unions, and it seems that they have responded to this.”

“We are very happy that they have reduced our fee; though ultimately dismayed that a union at a university such



as Cambridge should be paying such a small fee compared to comparable NUS affiliates,” she added.

NUS did not reply to a request for comment on why CUSU had been charged a reduced fee.

The relationship between CUSU and *The Cambridge Student* was publicly strained at the beginning of the week, with both releasing statements admonishing the other – before settling upon an unclear resolution.

In a briefing document released ahead of Monday's council, CUSU wrote: “Print continues to perform far below that expected with a significant loss in revenue from TCS expected for the end of the year.” When contacted by *Varsity*, the TCS board of directors stated that they were “surprised to find [their] financial situation discussed in the mid year financial budget review,” and had contacted Eyre “about what we perceive to be regrettable inaccuracies.”

▲ **Eyre presenting to Council on Monday night**
(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

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Will the NUS stay so cheap for CUSU?

Random? CUSU's shifting NUS fees

2015-16
£250

2016-17
£5,765

**2017-18
(budgeted)**
£10,527

**2017-18
(actual so far)**
£250

The National Union of Students' (NUS) decision to charge CUSU just £250 so far this year is the latest twist in a long-running saga of major swings in Cambridge's affiliation fees to the national body.

It appears that NUS is charging its hardship fee – reserved for small student

unions, or those experiencing substantial financial issues – rather than the £10,527 CUSU had expected to pay.

Two years ago, when Cambridge students narrowly voted to remain affiliated to NUS after a heated debate and referendum, the low affiliation fee CUSU paid had formed a major part of arguments made by those who said Cambridge should remain associated.

Last year, after having budgeted for the expected £250 fee, CUSU revealed it had been charged £5,765, which provoked an outcry in some anti-NUS quarters, but amounted to little change.

CUSU's general manager Mark McCormack said in comments revealed at the time that he had attempted to negotiate a reduction, but had been unsuccessful.

As it prepared its annual budget presentation, the student union was forced to acknowledge not only its own substantial overall losses, but that the NUS fee would shoot up again. Despite this, CUSU argued that the affiliation offered value for money overall.

In response to this, Eyre said that CUSU had “confirmed to [TCS] that the document accompanying the Mid-Year budget review is accurate.” Beyond this, Eyre added that CUSU have “no plans to change TCS’ funding.” The subject was raised again at Monday’s Council, when Eyre spoke of wanting to clear up “inaccuracies” surrounding TCS overspending its budget – an accusation which had not been made by either party to begin with.



▲ **The Cambridge Student became the centre of debate this week**
(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

On Thursday, Eyre told *Varsity*: “Over the weekend, there was a communication issue between TCS and CUSU that led to some confused press coverage. This was resolved through private communications between ourselves and TCS in which we confirmed that the paper was making a loss. Overall, we are concentrating our efforts on other income streams, such as our new careers project and on *BlueSci*, our other publication. While print advertising is in decline, niche publications like *BlueSci* are doing better.”

CUSU’s budget for the 2018-2019 academic year is set to be passed in Easter term. Its new “careers initiative,” which made its debut in 2017, underperformed financially in its first year. This was attributed to “limited market information to work upon” and not promoting the event until “the start of Summer.” However, with claims in the budget review that feedback on its new careers initiative was “positive,” and “presents optimism going into future,” CUSU trustees have decided not to change income projections.

Meanwhile, the CUSU financial enquiry has begun its investigation into the student union’s substantial losses. Connor MacDonald, who is chairing the enquiry, said: “we had a very productive first meeting. Daisy and CUSU have been very helpful, and we look forward to a more in detail meeting next week.” In its next meeting, the enquiry plans to meet with Gareth Marlow, CUSU’s longest-standing trustee.

Despite some boosts, the outlook stays grim for CUSU



Analysis
Catherine Lally
Investigations
Editor

Following the release of CUSU’s ‘Mid-Year Budget Review’, a tangible improvement in the student union’s strained financial situation does not appear to be on the cards. There was a brief discussion of the document at CUSU Council on Monday, but no JCRs expressed concern about the issue – possibly due to many JCR presidents having only recently been appointed, or not in attendance, and a new requirement that questions to be submitted at 4pm on the day of Council.

The document was released in the interests of transparency and in preparation for the next budget in Easter, but the next round of planning is unlikely to be any easier. The student union’s trustees have resolved to keep budget allocations for 2017/18 at their current levels. While CUSU has forecasted “a slightly smaller loss than that budgeted,” with a £31,000 positive variance once outstanding funds from the University have been transferred, it is still working at a loss. Its budget was passed in May 2017, with expected losses of £75,000 for the 2017-18 academic year. Even with new savings, the student union is still expected to run a deficit of £44,000 by the end of the year.

Some of CUSU’s savings have come from its ‘Representation and Campaigns’ budget – with the second-largest saving, £2,917, in salary costs for sabbaticals. By far the largest saving has come from a discount in its NUS Affiliation fee. In spite of having budgeted £10,527 for the fee, CUSU unexpectedly was only asked to pay £250. President Daisy Eyre told *Varsity* that CUSU had repeatedly emphasised its financial hardship to the national union: as things stand, we don’t know for sure that this figure won’t



▲ **CUSU’s headquarters on Mill Lane**
(SIMON LOCK)

fluctuate again.

It is also unclear as to whether CUSU has a firm idea of how it will replace its lost revenue streams, having operated at a deficit since the 2014-2015 academic year. Many of its current financial woes stem from the termination of its publishing contract with St. James’s House, which previously provided the student union with an annual £140,000 of “unrestricted funding”. While the document makes vague references to a new “replacement careers initiative,” it admits that this “underperformed financially in its first year,” despite supposed “positive” feedback. The student union claims to be moving forward optimistically, with the careers project expected to run “con-

cordantly with the Freshers Fair Careers Zone in 2018-19.”

The most concrete part of CUSU’s proposed solution appears to be asking the University for increased funding. It asked for an uplift in funding of £80,000, which was backed by the CCSSU and is yet to be approved by the University’s annual Planning Round, for which submissions were accepted in November.

Varsity reported in November on CUSU’s failure to meet any of the eight targets set out in its *Strategic Plan 2014-17*. These included aims to affiliate all Cambridge common rooms, a satisfaction rate of 58% from recent graduates in the NSS survey, and a move to greater independence in its funding. Following this disappointment, Eyre spoke of wanting to make the process of developing its next *Strategic Plan* “more organic” and “more flexible.” In an email sent out to students on Wednesday, Eyre showed signs of continuing in this approach, asking students to fill out a survey on aspects of the next *Strategic Plan* and sign up for its focus groups. For now, only time will tell whether students take up the call.

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Re-affiliation was strongly approved once again during Council last Easter, the statutory annual vote on NUS affiliation having previously been postponed amid concerns regarding the fee increase.

As events have unfolded, that

▼ **NUS president Shakira Martin**
(NUS UK)



charge did not materialise, and appears to have slightly softened the blow CUSU had anticipated this year.

Whether CUSU can count on the fee

51.52%

Percentage
of Cambridge
students who
voted to stay in
the NUS in 2016

never being charged is questionable, however: NUS did not reply to *Varsity*’s questions this week about why the discount had apparently been applied, and given the fluctuations seen in recent years, may change its mind again before the next CUSU budget is set.

The discount is only a small dent in the losses CUSU is expecting. A cash injection the student union is anticipating from the central University notwithstanding, its losses have been reduced only from £75,000 to £70,000 – if the NUS fee goes up again, losses could even be worse than expected.

News

Michael Bristow: China in drag



‘Before the internet my teacher thought he was alone’

Felix Peckham talks to the Asia journalist about his new book, which charts a journey through China with his cross-dressing teacher

My first attempt to interview the BBC World Service's Asia and Pacific editor is thwarted by North Korea. Michael Bristow is called away moments into our interview with the breaking news that North Korea is potentially pulling out of the Winter Olympics, hosted in South Korea in just a few weeks' time. The BBC needs a knowledgeable mind to broadcast this news to its diaspora audience around the world. Bristow is an obvious choice, as someone who has spent eight years in Beijing as a BBC Foreign Correspondent, and who has just published a book, *China in Drag*, about the story of Modern China and its ramifications for the wider region.

We manage to grab a few minutes between breaking news on the Korean peninsula, and Bristow gives me the endearing story of his book, though he admits it's less his book than that of his cross-dressing Mandarin teacher: 'His stories were really the stories of modern China.' Crucially, at the outset of his trip to write the story of China's rise over the past fifty years, Bristow was entirely unaware of his teacher's cross-dressing.

'On our first trip away he surprisingly revealed himself to be a cross-dresser. This is a man who was nearly sixty at the time, and it's unusual enough in China anyway, particularly for someone who is a little more elderly. He was born about the time the Communists took power – his ups and downs are mirrored in their fortunes as well. I thought it would be a good vehicle to enable me to tell the story of China, so we decided to travel around to various places associated with his story. Our story became his story, and particularly that of his cross-dressing and what people said and did when we encountered them.'

Most bookshops have a healthy collection of books on modern China, especially its rapid economic development. Many have whole tables and shelves dedicated to the topic. And yet few seem to talk of the social transformations that typically accompany such a fundamental economic shift. 'I don't think there has been massive social change in China,' Bristow tells me, explaining that Xi Jinping's Communist Party has been 'obsessed with keeping a lid on any group which is outside of its control.'

While internet censorship is rife in China, Bristow asserts that the internet has, nonetheless, been revolutionary for Chinese society: 'before the inter-



▲ **Michael Bristow is the BBC World Service Asia and Pacific editor**
(SANDSTONE PRESS)

“China and the leadership is really emboldened to flex its muscles”

net my teacher thought he was alone — he thought that he was the only man in China who liked to wear women's clothes. When he got on the internet it connected him like it's connected so many people. He found out there are others like him that he could connect with, meet up, form groups with, and go to clubs. That was the turning point in his life, and I can't emphasize enough how much of a relief that was for him, to find out that he wasn't alone.'

Despite not naming his teacher, to protect his identity, Bristow is keen to emphasize that one of the conclusions that *China in Drag* reaches is that 'Chinese people are actually quite tolerant when it comes to things which aren't normally expected, such as different sexual or gender expressions — tolerant in many ways more than people in the West, which in some respects you would imagine to be more advanced.'

Few would doubt that Donald Trump's reactionary and incoherent rhetoric has altered the power balance to some extent in the region of South East Asia. 'China and the leadership is really emboldened to flex its muscles.'

Bristow tells me, which is a result of China's rapid economic growth: 'China has become richer and it feels more confident. Previously it would hide its intentions or keep a low profile, but now it's more willing to show themselves. Just this week when they announced their increased economic growth figures, the leadership were talking about a 'New World Order', and how the world needs China. It is increasingly emboldened, which has happened at the same time as the US has a president which has undermined America's traditional support for freedom of speech and free trade.'

There is no more pertinent or contentious issue than that of a nuclear North Korea. The repressive authoritarian state is a political hot potato, nestled between South Korea — a staunch, heavily militarized US ally — and China, a fiercely independent foe of the 'traditional' Western concept of a World Order. North Korea is a complex issue for China, and is at the top of its foreign policy agenda. It is a chance for it to assert its independence and foreign policy might, but also an opportunity to strengthen diplomatic links with the US and key players in their

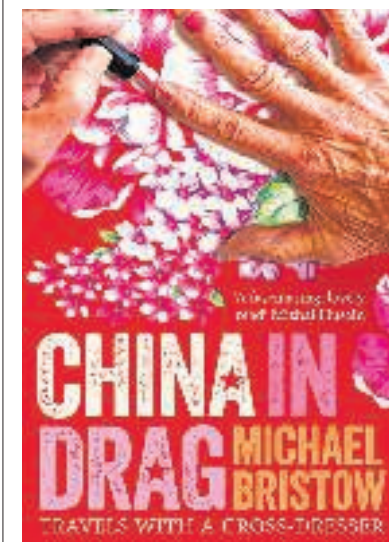
region, namely South Korea and Japan.

'There are two primary important factors for China,' Bristow tells me 'One, it doesn't want North Korea to become a nuclear power, because that could have ramifications for the whole region — which we've seen with South Korea taking in more American weapons for example, which China feels threatened about, and this could lead to an arms race which would destabilize the region. North Korea's nuclear weapons could even threaten China at a later date. So they aren't happy about that.'

'But what it's less happy about is the unification of North and South Korea which, in effect, wouldn't be a unification but would be South Korea swallowing up whole North Korea because it's just a basket case in terms of economic development. And you would have an American ally right on China's border. It wants that even less than it wants a nuclear North Korea. So, at the moment, China is unwilling to completely cut ties with North Korea. At some point in the future that balance might change.'

From the giant and complicated state of China, to a giant and complicated corporation, I ask Bristow about his employer, the BBC, and its reputation abroad: 'It might come to a surprise to people in Britain how much the BBC is respected across the world and it really adds to Britain's soft power. We are a tiny nation but we have some cultural aspects which allow us to get a punch above our weight in terms of our impact on the world.' Despite recent controversies over pay inequality, for example, Bristow is keen to defend the 'brand' power of the organisation, emphasizing that the BBC is 'trusted' and respected for doing its 'best to give as impartial news as possible, to try to get the truth and to reflect opinion.'

'Journalism is fascinating because you get to see all aspects of life.' I can't help but wholeheartedly agree with Bristow. It would seem difficult not to feel this way about the profession having travelled around one of the most exciting and complicated nations in modern history, with a cross-dresser, tracing changes in attitude in a traditionally conservative society.



▶ **Bristow's book considers China's rapid economic and cultural changes**
(SANDSTONE PRESS)



Classical figurine

The social media page 'LEGO Classicists' made a mini Mary Beard

(LEGO CLASSICISTS)



Everything you need to know about the National Student Survey debate

Noella Chye
Senior News Editor

The tension surrounding the controversial National Student Survey (NSS) will reach fever pitch this week as 'Boycott the NSS' campaigners are set to burn the bright-yellow NSS pamphlets in a bonfire this Saturday.

Today's edition of *Varsity* also features a debate (p.16) on whether students should complete the NSS. Pro-vice-chancellor for education, Graham Virgo, writes in its defence, against CUSU education officer Martha Krish and Cambridge Defend Education's Matt Kite.

The NSS, commissioned by the government's Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and sent to final-year undergraduate students every year, is used to produce the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), an annual publication now in its third run. The TEF evaluates higher education institutions across three metrics — graduate employment, student retention, and student satisfaction — with the latter being calculated using the NSS.

The framework awards gold, silver, bronze and provisional standards to its 293 participating institutions. Those awarded gold and silver standards may then be allowed to raise their tuition fees.

Following a vote in the House of Commons in April last year, the link between the TEF and tuition fees will only be introduced in 2020, and will require an independent review of the TEF to be presented to parliament.

The core questionnaire of the 2017 NSS asked students to rate their institutions by evaluating their level of agreement with 27 claims, such as, "Staff value students' views and opinions about the course".

Cambridge was one of 60 institutions



▲ Pro-vice-chancellor Graham Virgo

(UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)

awarded gold in the first 'trial' TEF published in June 2017. 115 institutions were awarded silver, and 53 bronze.

In 2017, the NSS became the target of widespread criticism, with the NUS advocating for a national boycott.

In Cambridge, CUSU and Cambridge Defend Education (CDE) supported the boycott alongside 25 student unions, urging eligible students not to take the survey. Leaders of the boycott claimed to have achieved success in August last year, when Cambridge's results for the NSS were declared invalid due to an insufficient turnout, along with 11 other universities including Oxford, Manchester, and Bristol.

The CUSU and CDE campaign to boycott the NSS was renewed this year on 5th January — with the backing of Krish and Kite — just before the 2018 NSS was sent out to finalists on 8th January.

The campaign's latest development, described on its Facebook event page as "a FIRE where we will ceremonially burn the horrible yellow nss leaflets currently being distributed", will be "open to anyone who likes fire and left wing politics".

Meanwhile, on page 16, Virgo challenges Krish and Kite with his claim that "completing the NSS, whilst still constituting a metric for the TEF, will not have an impact on tuition fees."

BUILDING BRIDGES

Fitzwilliam Master to step down

Professor Nicky Padfield, the Master of Fitzwilliam College, has announced to the college's governing body that she intends to step down from her position at the end of the academic year 2018-19. Padfield, who is also the Director of Cambridge Centre for Criminal Justice and Professor in Criminal Justice and Penal Justice, became Master in October 2013 and has been a fellow since 1991.



ADCINDIES

Cindies to host ADC plays in Easter term

The ADC Theatre have announced that Cindies and the Round Church will be some of the venues used for productions as part of their 'ADC on Tour' programme. The nightclub will provide the venue for *Zanna Don't* in Week 3 of Easter term. Refurbishment works at the theatre, including the installation of a new ventilation system for the auditorium, mean it will be closed for six months between April and October.

LOOKING FOR DOGGO

Cockapoo kidnapping hotspot

Cockapoos have become increasingly popular with dog thieves in Cambridgeshire, comprising almost 10% of missing dog cases, according to new police data. The dogs are currently the seventh most popular breed in the UK according to a poll conducted by ITV. Staffie cross-breeds still remain the most common choice for thieves, with six recorded missing last year.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Cantabs help launch Parliamentary group

MPs and peers from across the political spectrum have come together to launch the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Future Generations. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) will be chaired by Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner, and was created by students Tildy Stokes and Natalie Jones, who will serve as Secretariat. The aim of the APPG is to combat short-termism in politics.

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Cracking the code of gender disparity at the 2018 Cambridge hackathon

● Hack Cambridge took place at the Corn Exchange over the weekend with 67 women and non-binary participants

● Second place was taken by the only all-women team

Stephanie Stacey
Senior News Correspondent

Last weekend, over 300 students gathered at the Corn Exchange to participate in the third annual Hack Cambridge, a 24-hour-long competition designed to urge teams to develop innovative technological projects, and the first year that special efforts were made on the organisers' part to encourage women hackers to take part.

In Cambridge, women accounted for just 13.6% of undergraduates studying for the Computer Science Tripos for the 2016-17 academic year, making them an underrepresented group.

Despite annual variations, with the proportion of female students in the subject falling below 10% in some years, little progress appears to have been made in attracting young women — the proportion of women students sixteen years ago, in 2000-01, for example, was at a similar level of 13.3%.

This gender imbalance is often very visible at hackathons. Peter Scharrer, Communications Manager for Hack Cambridge, told *Varsity*, "This year we've worked really hard to try and minimise the gender disparity."

In the lead-up to the event, Hack Cambridge worked with several female and non-binary organisations, including Women@CL, a positive action programme for women in computing research, and the Cambridge University Women in Business Society (CAMWIB), "to make sure the recruitment process reached as many talented female students as possible."

They also organised a dinner with one of the event sponsors, Improbable, solely for female and non-binary students.

Scharrer added, "Mainly our outreach efforts have been attempting to make clear that hackathons, and computer science, are for *everyone* and certainly not something that so many brilliant young women should feel turned away from."

According to statistics from Hack Cambridge organisers, 67 of 322 participants (20.8%) identified as a gender other than male.

Although a wide variety of subjects were represented at the hackathon, including Law and Linguistics, the vast majority of students were undertaking technology or engineering based degrees, with almost 50% studying pure Computer Science.

There was an enthusiastic atmosphere



▼ **The second-placed creators of Pantry Log with their design** (STEPHANIE STACEY)

at the hackathon, with hackers eager to see and learn from the various projects on display around the room, as well as to share their own creations and insights.

A huge range of projects were undertaken, with some aiming to tackle important issues in society — such as seizure identification — and others to create enjoyable, often humorous, programmes.

During the twenty-four hours, one team of hackers created 'Bad Flamingo', a high-tech version of Pictionary in which players attempt to draw objects sufficiently 'badly' or uniquely that the computer is unable to recognise them, but not so strangely that their partner is unable to identify the image.

The creators of 'Bad Flamingo' took home the Hack Cambridge trophy, after their game was judged to be the "most innovative, technically challenging and well-designed project."

Only one team consisted entirely of women. They designed 'Pantry Log,' an app to monitor food purchases and expiry dates in order to minimise waste, for which they won second place. Team members Silvia Sabora, Elena Liu and Ami Zou said the project was inspired by "a combination of love for food and a tech addiction."



Meanwhile, others chose to focus on developing medical technology, including programs to aid the visually impaired and those suffering from fits or seizures. Speaking to *Varsity*, one participant, Alex Thorne, said that his goal was to "use computers to provide much-needed assistance to those struggling with mental health issues," noting specifically that technology can help us to "understand ourselves better."

Many teams, even those who created games, considered practical uses. The creators of 'Mission Hack,' a "modern treasure hunt" with the goal of "game-ifying the environment," suggested that possible applications of their project include education as well as health and safety training.

Scharrer described the hackathon as "a collaborative programming experience that brings together talented students and allows young computer scientists, engineers, and designers to hone their skills in a social and enjoyable environment." He continued, "Every year we try to work with some really inspiring companies to provide our hackers with a huge range of hardware and software with which they can produce their projects."

Although most were rather sleep-deprived by the end of 24 hours of coding, several participants described the experience as "enjoyable and valuable". Many seemed keen to participate again in future; if the organisers' campaign has been successful, more of them will be women.

▲ **21% of hackathon participants were women** (MATHIAS HAMMER)

Tech success The best projects

Bad Flamingo

The game functions like a high-tech version of Pictionary, in which players attempt to draw objects sufficiently 'badly' or uniquely that the computer is unable to recognise them, but not so strangely that their partner is unable to identify the image. The 'Bad Flamingo' team scooped up first place at the Hackathon for their "innovative, technically challenging and well-designed project."

Pantry Log

Created by the only all-women team to participate in the event, Pantry Log was awarded second prize. The app seeks to minimise kitchen waste by monitoring users' food purchases and the expiry dates of perishable items. Its creators said that they had been inspired by "a combination of love for food and a tech addiction."

Mission Hack

Among the more light-hearted entries to this year's hackathon was Mission Hack, described as a "modern treasure hunt" that would enable players to "game-ify" their environment. Its applications are not wholly frivolous, however, with its designers suggesting that their creation could be deployed as an educational tool, or during health and safety training.

“This year we’ve worked really hard to try and minimise the gender disparity”

Opinion

Privilege is about more than paying school fees

Educational privilege is more than a 400 year history and a cricket pitch



Peter Chappell is a third year at Downing studying English

Peter Chappell

Private schools are a Bad Thing. Any reasonable person admits it. Everyone knows 7% of children are educated at fee-paying institutions, yet they dominate 'the establishment', making up nearly 50% of the Cambridge undergraduate population. But our fixation on misbehaving private schools, with their nice blazers and mummies in Range Rovers, distracts from the huge disparities in the quality of education within comprehensive schools. Where you live, what your parents do, how much they earn, and the priority they place on education (read: how much they will punish you if you don't do your D.T homework), matters every bit as much as if you went to the comp or to a school founded by Royal Charter sometime before 1400.

Children on free school meals are 27% less likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C. Half of all free school meal children are educated in just a fifth of all schools. Deprivation and poor educational attainment is highly concentrated, and hidden. Cambridge may be a middle-class fiefdom, but so are the good comps from which it draws many of its students. There are mainly middle-class schools, and then there are mainly working-class and ethnic-minority schools. Both are part of the 'comprehensive' system, but there is little comprehensive about it: the term stifles

“There are huge disparities in education within comprehensive schools”



▲ Diane Reay has spoken out against the use of league tables (YOUTUBE/FREEDOM TO LEARN PROJECT)

debate on variation between schools.

Government decisions have exacerbated the problem. The introduction of league tables for comprehensive schools by the Major government meant that headteachers focused on beating other schools, not on nurturing their own pupils. Under Tony Blair, we were warned there would be “no hiding place” for schools not striving to improve themselves. League tables might have had positive effects: they have been the first step on the road to recognising variation within the school system. Diane Reay, Cambridge's Professor of Education, told *The Guardian*, “because the schools that working-class children mostly go to are not doing well in the league tables, there's a lot of pressure on their teachers and heads to increase their league table position. That means they focus ruthlessly on reading, writing and arithmetic”. Working class kids may do alright in maths, because without it you really are screwed. But education is about so much more than that: good comprehensives have the bandwidth for art, for music, for PE, because they can afford it, or their parents can pay for clubs, or the kids are being tutored at home, meaning they pick things up quicker in class.

Let's say you are looking for a school for your eleven-year-old in Potters Bar, a town bordering North London. The school where everyone wants to go is Dame Alice Owens, which brags 96% of GCSE students securing 5 A*-C grades and 21 Oxbridge offers in 2017. The situation is made particularly tricky because Owens' catchment area extends all the way into Islington, but only into a tiny bit of Potters Bar. The second

choice is Chancellor's School, where 70% of GCSE pupils achieve 5 A*-C grades. The bottom of the pile is Mount Grace. Mount Grace is known as 'Mount Disgrace', such is the shame in attending it. Families who know how to work the system, who can afford to fund accretions like violin tuition or rugby training are more likely to be successful in the school race. People get rightly het up about grammar schools institutionalising education inequality, but aren't these disparities in the comprehensive system having precisely the same effect?

We have a system where children born in the same ward of the same hospital and educated in the same 'comprehensive' school system have wildly different chances in life. The media are obsessed with stale stereotypes of where power and wealth have their seat: articles on 'elitism' and education privilege are illustrated with images of Eton, Harrow and Westminster. The conversation about what a good school, education and student mean is too narrow. This article hasn't even taken into account the complex social hierarchies which exist within schools themselves: everything from the state of your uniform to having the space at home for a desk speaks eloquently of your class and of your chances. Many students at Cambridge have had these disadvantages, and have overcome them through hard work. This should be celebrated, but we need to have a more candid discussion about why they had to be overcome in the first place. Whether you are privileged is about a lot more than whether you paid school fees.

More meme than MP? The Irish crisis of political dignity

Nadia Hourihan notes how British politicians are following in Ireland's defensive, self-deprecating footsteps

“With all due respect, in the most unparliamentary language, fuck you Deputy Stagg! Fuck you!”

“Eh-eh-eh-excuse me”

“I apologise now for my use of unparliamentary language”

“Deh-deh-deputy Gogarty, that is most unparliamentary language”.

A week into first year, an English friend quoted this to me, which took place in the Dáil (the Irish lower house) in 2009. The popularity of this clip is surprising, until you think about the meme-centric ways we now consume politics. We consume humiliation and blunders before serious journalism. The Irish have long known that our political establishment is a bit embarrassing. Irish politicians swaggered round making promises as big as their egos with-

out having enough money in the national pocket. After the Celtic Tiger bloated our balance sheets, the following financial crash hardly helped us take ourselves more seriously. The last twenty years have conditioned the Irish to be wary of self-styled financial Messiahs.

On a world stage, Ireland threw tantrums over its treatment by a key trading partner: Britain. Time and again, this proved to be more self-sabotage than the desired coup de grace. The gulf between how Ireland has seen itself (serious, important, the land of Yeats and Wilde), and how it has been seen abroad (not so serious, not so important, the land of *Father Ted* and *Mrs Brown's Boys*) generated a jealously guarded self-deprecation. Us Irish have license to say vicious things about ourselves, but if anyone else giggles we

“I do urge attention to Irish history, for there are lessons to be learned from it”

hiss in outrage.

But social media is a Trojan horse, smuggling foreign spectators into the national psyche. Anyone who follows the online musings of Irish people can get in on the jokes we make at our own expense: Simon Harris, the Minister for Health is not-so-secretly a vampire and TD (MP) Jack Chambers has never seen his own nipples. Irish twitter is a strange place, and the nature of our online lives has welcomed the world to gape at our perversions.

Ireland's successful defense of the national interest in December's Brexit negotiations will leave less of a mark in the minds of the young than our accidental legalization of ecstasy, crystal meth and mushrooms in 2015, Gerry Adam's weird tweets, and Leo Varadkar's tank tops.

But, for what feels like the first time, the UK is suffering a crisis of seriousness too.

The UK is struggling to take its politics seriously. The Brexit referendum has infantilized parliament, which now must pursue what it thinks of as



an act of national self-sabotage. British politicians scramble to appease opposed groups of people, with opposed promises. Serious questions are being asked of the health of the Government's supply and confidence agreement. The Conservative's three-legged race with the DUP might yet collapse before the finish line.

On a world stage, the UK is throwing a tantrum directed at its most important trading partner: the European Union. This is proving to be more self-sabotage than an assertion of sovereignty. A gulf exists between how the UK sees itself (serious, powerful, the land of Churchill and Shakespeare), and how it is seen abroad (not so serious, a declining power, the land of Farage and Katie Hopkins). It all sounds eerily familiar. So, next time you see a Maybot meme, remember that the Irish have been through the same crisis of seriousness. When such a crisis threatens a nation's dignity, scapegoats are found. For the Irish, a contempt for Britain has been exploited to make up for a slighted sense of self. I only hope the British don't find a similar punching bag in the European Union.



Lara Erritt

We must not teach a one-dimensional view of Africa

Rashidat Animashaun explores the misrepresentation of Africa in Western culture, and what can be done to rectify it



Rashidat Animashaun is a first year at Trinity Hall studying HSPS

With Trump's recent remarks about the whole of the African continent in mind — yes, a continent, not a single country — it must be asked, why are we surprised? Aside from Trump's history of racism and xenophobia, his new statements about Africa have expressed not so much a fringe opinion, but rather one a silent minority holds.

From as young as I can remember, the narrative around Africa has focused on depicting the continent as the "sick man" of the world. Plagued by poverty, corruption and failed political experiments, nothing good had or would emerge from it on its own. In 2000 *The Economist* produced a front page called the "Hopeless Continent" which illustrates the point that this is not an imagined opinion of Africa, but one that is willingly constructed by the media. Although CNN runs more cheerful segments such as African Voices, many of

the daily depictions of Africa are of the malnourished bodies of African children, or young men smuggled across seas looking for salvation in Europe. Even though Africa still suffers many of these problems, this image is frequently the only aspect of Africa shown in the West. Thus, it may not be so shocking for many people to see Africa as essentially a "shithole".

But as a child of Nigerian immigrants, I know this to be a very shallow understanding of Africa. Rich in history and culture and energised by the hunger of a growing middle class and an impassioned diaspora, many nations on the continent are growing rapidly. Two thirds of Africa's growth since 2000 came from wholesale, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and manufacturing. Africa's economic future is on the rise. Although African political experiments with democracy have been hard and sometimes bloody, the successful transition of power

in Nigeria (2014), Ghana (2016) and eventually in Gambia (2017) should be celebrated more, thus refreshing the continent's image as a land of dynamic economies and societies hungry for change and success. Let us not be too hasty to criticise the slow improvement in African democracy; even the most successful democracy in the world, the USA, is grappling with a leader willing to promote conspiracy theories of a "deep state".

So, why isn't this new image of Africa as visible on our frontpages or our TV screens as the old image? Why are so many stories regarding Africa limited to poverty, war and corruption? Is it possible that the persistence of a colonial narrative of Africa facilitates a colonial response: Africa as a place of low intellect, savagery and therefore in need of a white saviour? The recent British news coverage delighted in the fall of Mugabe, but what was neglected from many articles about Britain's long history with Zimbabwe was that Mugabe was once Britain's darling, a highly praised democrat. There remains a habit of telling a modified version of history when it comes to Africa's woes. Instead of poking fun of Africa, we should be equipping ourselves with more knowledge about its history and people.

In compulsory education, how much

did we learn about Africa? I remember years of re-learning Tudor or World War Two history, but aside from the transatlantic slave trade, the history of any African country did not appear. Why should only British history be considered so important as to teach it multiple times in school? Understandings of the Kingdom of Kongo, the Benin Empire or the Kingdom of Kush were left for me to explore individually. Students in my school wanted to write their A-Level coursework on African history, but were dissuaded by teachers because it was, supposedly, too complicated to mark accurately. It is the failings of the British and American education systems that must be held accountable for the one-dimensional understanding of Africa. Trump is simply a symptom of a larger institutional problem.

The point of this article was not to tarnish anyone with the label of racism, but to offer a more critical lens as to why and how Africa is still depicted in a way that makes the comment of "shithole" accurate for some. To tackle this one-dimensional narrative requires an education system that explores Africa in a more nuanced way. This cannot be limited to just one, oversubscribed third year Africa module, but must begin in our compulsory education and our international news.

“There's still a habit of telling a modified version of history”

Opinion: The NSS Debate

Marketisation puts higher education in jeopardy



Matt Kite is a member of Cambridge Defend Education. Martha Krish is CUSU Education Officer.

Martha Krish
& Matt Kite

Students should not fill in the National Student Survey (NSS) because we must refuse to be complicit in reforms that will damage our education system. The NSS is bad for teaching quality, could be used to raise fees, and continues to wear down the idea that education should be a public good, not simply a commodity that students buy as an entry fee for graduate employment.

The government's current agenda for universities was announced in a white paper called *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, written not by the Department for Education but by the Business Department. It explicitly aims to create a competitive market in higher education, where students are customers and an education is a product. One part of that is the creation of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a system designed to rank and create competition between universities.

It uses metrics including drop-out rates, graduate employment statistics, and results from the NSS. TEF was first announced alongside a promise to link performance with funding, persuading universities to participate in the reforms with the promise that if they did well on TEF they would be allowed to charge higher fees.

Last year NUS and universities across the country coordinated a national boy-

cott of the NSS, to oppose and to obstruct those changes. At 12 universities, including Cambridge, that boycott was successful enough that the NSS results were invalidated due to low response rates and didn't count towards TEF. The boycott was mentioned in the House of Lords discussion of the Higher Education Bill and led to concessions from the government, with a delay on differentiated fees between universities, and no link between TEF and fees this year.

The objections to participation in the NSS last year still hold true. There has been no guarantee that the temporary freeze on tuition fees will continue or that the link between NSS, TEF and fees will not exist in the long term. In fact, there is every reason to believe that the upcoming funding review will reinstate that link. Removing the cap on tuition fees so that universities can compete on price as well as reputation is at the heart of the government's long-term plan; we should not be mollified by temporary delaying tactics aimed at pushing opposition into the long grass.

The TEF will use results from the NSS over three years, so building on the success of last year's boycott is the only way to ensure that Cambridge students' views are not co-opted as part of this agenda. Boycotting the NSS remains one of our best opportunities to make a clear statement against the direction of higher

“We have an unusual power to make a statement”

►Former NUS president Malia Bouattia headed last year's NSS boycott (FACEBOOK)

education which is becoming increasingly inaccessible and elitist. This shows itself in the use of NSS results, which show racial and gendered bias, and produce data which is a blunt instrument that does a poor job of describing the actual experiences of students. Researchers at the University of Reading found that BME lecturers are rated consistently worse on the survey, which they said indiscriminately reproduces the biases of respondents.

Universities obsess over how they perform on each of the NSS questions, forcing departments that perform poorly on particular metrics to waste time and scarce resources improving their scores on a questionnaire which often does not reflect students' views or priorities accurately. Pressure from metrics designed to measure grade inflation, for example, gives departments a disincentive to tackle racial attainment gaps or welfare-related underperformance because of the risk that solving those pressing problems would damage their statistics.

The Royal Statistical Society told the government it was “not aware that there is any evidence of a statistical associa-

tion” between TEF and NSS, and that NSS results punish innovative teaching even when it works well.

At Cambridge we have an unusual power to make a statement. Our actions attract national attention that is disproportionate to the size of our institution and no-one need worry that unpublished NSS results will cause significant damage to Cambridge's reputation as a leading university. CUSU has contact with many student unions that oppose TEF, and that wish they could boycott the NSS, but that fear having their funding cut if they do. This makes it especially important that we use this opportunity to stand up for an education system for everyone.

We hope that students will continue to ignore emails asking them to fill in the survey, and not be fooled by advertising claiming that the NSS offers

students a real opportunity to “shape the future” of higher education. In reality, it will only be used to allow the government to keep pushing an agenda that will be bad for us all. We encourage students to join with those at Oxford, UCL, SOAS and others nationally who are refusing to have their data used in changes that we should all oppose.



The NSS is an opportunity to improve Cambridge



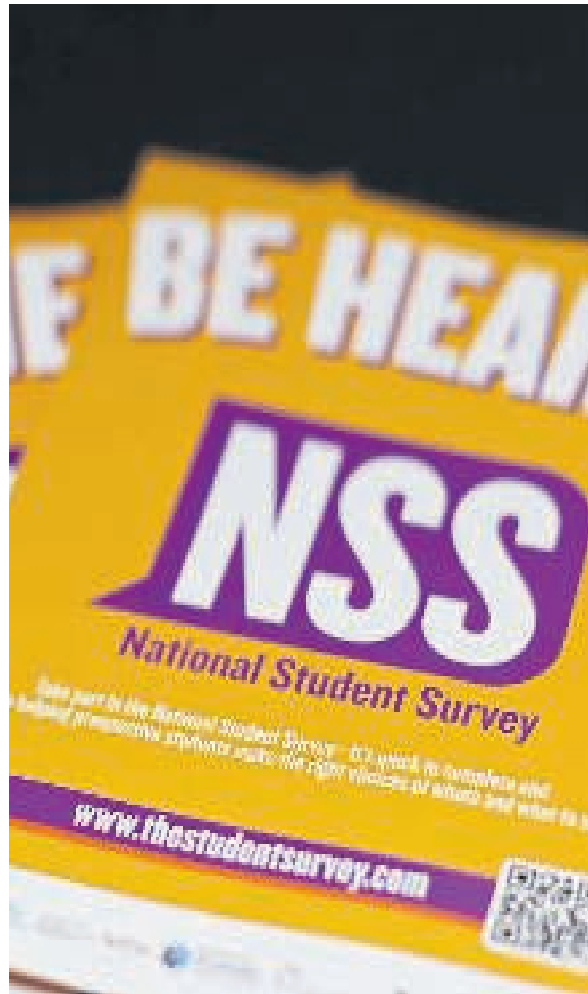
Graham Virgo is pro-vice-chancellor for education at Cambridge University

Graham
Virgo

The National Student Survey (NSS) has run each year for more than 10 years and the feedback which students have provided through this survey to the University has helped to improve teaching and learning support in many subjects.

Feedback from the NSS is collated and analysed by the University. In my role as pro-vice-chancellor for education, I take the NSS results very seriously. Following the 2017 Survey, as in previous years, I made it a priority to meet with senior academics from those subjects where student satisfaction fell below the high standard we all expect of Cambridge teaching. In these meetings I challenged heads of department and directors of teaching to develop action plans with their students to address any shortcomings. Thanks to the input of Cambridge students, significant improvements have been, and continue to be, implemented. I also contacted those faculties and departments that achieved exceptional results, including three subjects last year that scored 100% satisfaction.

At University level, we use the NSS results to identify and remedy areas of concern. A particular focus over the past few years has been assessment and feedback. This prompted the launch of a Review of Examinations which was completed last Easter term, and which contains a number of recommendations to ensure that the examination system is fit for purpose, including the adoption of a wider variety of modes of assessment. I will be working with faculties



▲The NSS provides data that is used to determine rankings in the Teaching Excellence Framework (LOUIS ASHWORTH)

and departments this year to determine how these recommendations should be implemented.

In addition to the main NSS questions, we make use of the facility to add other questions from a bank of optional questions, and we also add two questions each year proposed by CUSU, which are specifically tailored to the student experience at collegiate Cambridge. With the support and engagement of CUSU, responses to questions about workload were fed into a review in 2016, which resulted in a number of important recommendations about managing student workload at Cambridge. I continue to monitor carefully responses from the NSS about student workload, bearing in mind my concerns about the adverse effect of a heavy workload on student mental health.

If NSS results in a particular subject and for a University as a whole reach the threshold of a 50% return rate, those results are published on the Unistats website so are available to potential applicants to assist them in determining whether they wish to apply to Cambridge. These published results are also used extensively in the league tables produced by the national and international press, in which the University does so well.

Published NSS results also feed into the Teaching Excellence Framework, alongside other measures, but in response to pressure from a number of universities, including Cambridge, the weight attached to NSS in future iterations of the TEF has been halved.

While the Teaching Excellence Framework is controversial, it does mean that there has been a renewed focus on the quality of teaching and learning at universities, a matter of real importance in the light of high tuition fees. Students are now paying a lot for their university experience and need to have confidence in the quality of their education. I share the views of many students that the introduction of tuition fees is unfair and unjust (I was one of the students who was lucky to be educated at Cambridge at a time when grants meant my education was free). Initially, the government proposed a direct link between performance in the TEF and tuition fees. That link was broken by the Higher Education Reform Act last year, so completing the NSS will not have an impact on tuition fees.

This year Cambridge is participating in a pilot testing different models for subject-level TEF. This is an important opportunity for us to influence the shape of the exercise for future years before we consider participating again in 2020 when our current Gold rating expires.

For those students who are eligible to complete the NSS, typically finalists, when you decide whether to do so, I would urge you to keep in mind the invaluable role which your feedback plays in helping prospective students from all backgrounds to make informed decisions and in improving the Cambridge experience for future students. Students must be at the heart of the higher education system and the NSS provides students with a voice which we really want to hear.

Vulture

Features [pg 20-21] What is addiction?
Fashion [pg 22-23] Play time photoshoot
Film & TV [pg 24] Bryan Cranston
interviewed by Lillian Crawford
Arts [pg 25] The Art of the Deal
Music [pg 26-27] *Vulture* Tunes
Theatre [pg 28-29] *Romeo and Juliet*



Vintage Winter Chic

Photography by James Luis

Vulture Fashion got playful this week, as we took to the swings and slides for a late winter photoshoot. Patterned dresses and thick jumpers were paired with classic converses and denim. All our clothes came from local Cambridge shops Fantasia and Barefoot Vintage – check them out! **[Pages 22-23]**

Vulture

● **Features** 20-21
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Fantasia and Bare Foot Vintage

Check out our first photoshoot of term. All pieces are from local Cambridge shops, Fantasia and Bare Foot Vintage

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Brian Cranston interview

Our opinionated Film & TV Editor Lillian Crawford sits down with the star of *Breaking Bad* to chat about Wes Anderson and *Trumbo*

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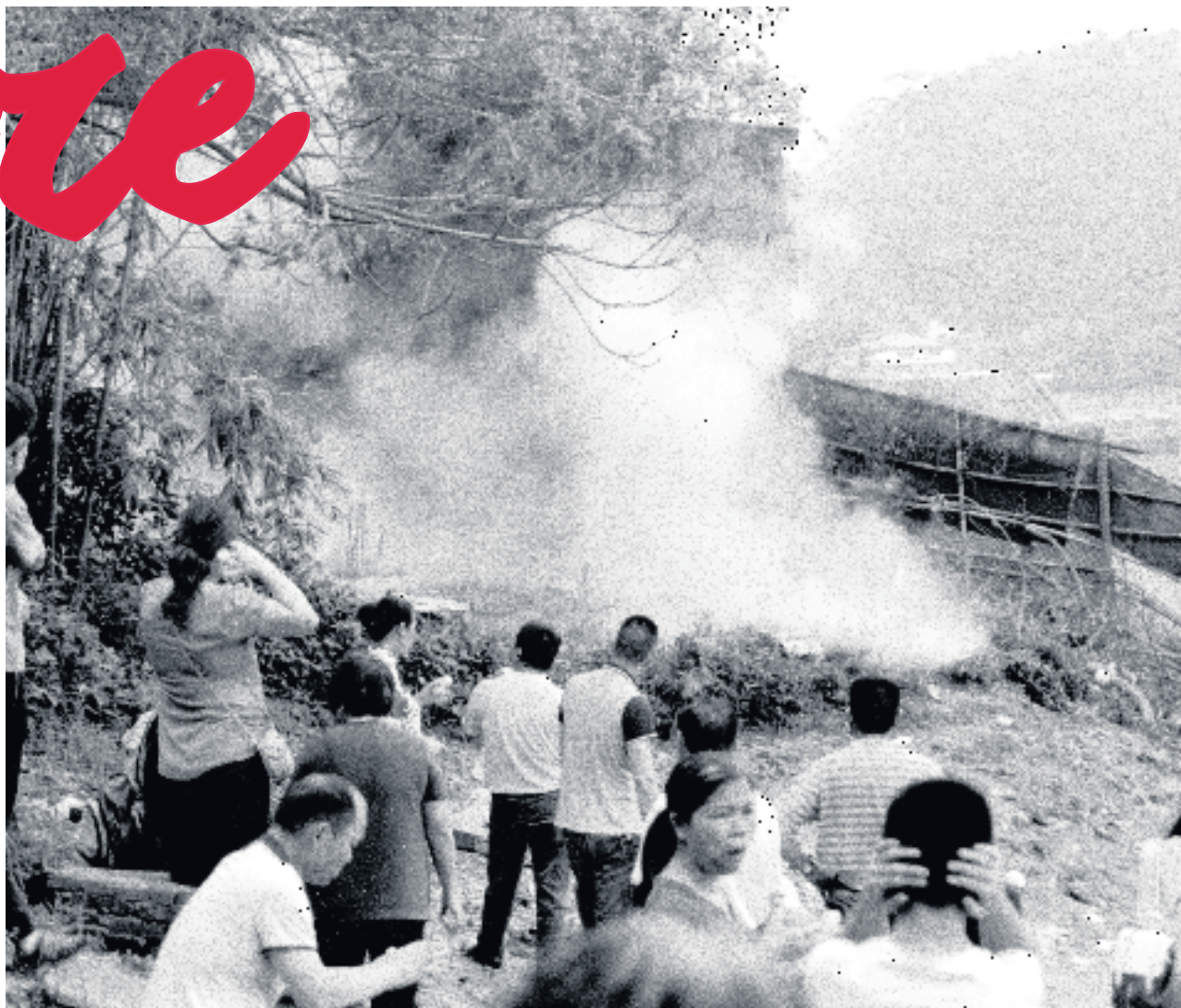
Vulture Tunes

Everything Everything, Gregory Porter and Superfood all make the cut on this most eclectic of mixtapes

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Off the page

Bea Santos gives her top ways to experience theatre away from the written word, breathing some life into your reading list



Making art within the *third space*

Elizabeth Howcroft chats with Jay Parekh about BME art in Cambridge

In *The Location of Culture*, critical theorist Homi Bhabha discusses the 'Third Space' – a hybrid place, inhabited by those who are caught somewhere between 'here' and 'there', belonging to two cultures but fully occupying neither. It is from this concept that the upcoming exhibition of BME artwork gets its name.

Jay Parekh, a third-year architect at Sidney, tells how a lecture on postcolonial theory inspired the exhibition. "I remember a lot of us coming out of that lecture so angry, but also feeling empowered. One of those moments where everything just clicks, and you feel like doing something about it."

Held in Sidney Sussex's squash court, *third space* will display artwork by BME students. "It's not just art by BME people", Jay clarifies, "it's art about being BME."

"It's about exploring the issues that we face; such as representation, marginalisation, displacement, communication, discrimination etc."

One of the most interesting ways that people have got involved in the exhibition is through family photographs, which often tell the most personal stories.

Kaye Song's photo series shows a traditional ceremony of ancestral veneration she attended with her father near his hometown of Guangzhou, in China. She is reduced to the role of spectator as she watches relatives she had never met take part in rituals which were unfamiliar only to her.

The exhibition will also feature a metre-wide painting by Kayoon Anderson, who explores the definition of identity through a portrait of her brother, Seungyeon. Kayoon and Seungyeon both have British and Korean passports but Kayoon considers the sibling bond between them to have formed her identity more than any physical place.

The photo series *Apology to Green Street* by Faria Tabassum captures the multicultural London street where she grew up. In a powerful essay of the same name, written for Gal-Dem, Faria discussed the shame she felt as a child. "I would complain about the smells; heavy from the sweat of bustling crowds, pungent from raw meat and fish. Implicitly, my issue was with the people who occupied the spaces, created the scents and existed visibly and vibrantly. People who were no different from me and my mother, both first-generation immigrants from Bangladesh. My egotistical snobbery wanted to separate myself from the very people whose relentless labour built up a safe community for marginalised people to occupy."

Just how individualised this "third space" is becomes clear through the variety of forms through which it is expressed. Jay's film, which will be shown at the end of the night, is a documentary about cooking the ancient Gujarati meal, okra, from recipes passed down through generations. Far more complex ideas of identity, culture, one's home and one's self, are at play here and their exposition is as careful and intellectual as it is personal.

Find the full version of Ellie's piece online. The exhibition 'third space' will be at Sidney Squash Courts on Saturday 27th January, 7-11pm, with a live poetry reading at 9pm, followed by a film screening ●



What's On This Week



MUSIC 27TH, KING'S CHAPEL

Verdi Requiem
Cambridge University Orchestra, Cambridge University Chamber Choir, and the Choirs of Caius, Jesus, Selwyn and St Catharine's Colleges unite for a night of Verdi.

FASHION 27TH, ST PAUL'S

Vintage Kilo Sale
Supplied by Europe's LARGEST vintage wholesaler, The Vintage Clothing Kilo Sale is £3 earlybird and £1.50 general

THEATRE 23RD-27TH, ADC

Piranha Heights
Phillip Ridley's play is an apocalyptic vision of society at conflict with itself, as family drama quickly becomes fatal. A must see for lovers of dark theatre.

THEATRE 23RD-27TH, CORPUS

There is a War, A Comedy
Tom Basden's bleakly comic play about the absurdity of war is being performed for five nights at the Corpus Playroom.

RADIO THURSDAYS AT 3PM, CAM.FM

The Vulture Show
Our hosts Pany Heliotis and Martha O'Neil bring all of Vulture's culture chops to the airwaves, with interviews, previews, and all the best stuff from our print edition.

THEATRE 23RD-27TH, CORPUS

Conviction
Surreal characters, strange comedy, confusing storylines and a fist made of ham. Head start your Lent term with a blast of hilarity.

FILM 27TH, CHRIST'S COLLEGE

The Room / Christ's Film
Once dubbed the *Citizen Kane* of bad movies, Tommy Wiseau's cult classic is showing this Saturday—come along, don't be a chicken, cheep cheep cheep.

MUSIC 28TH, KING'S CHAPEL



Endelienta Baroque
Endelienta Baroque presents an exciting array of works by J.S. Bach on period instruments, as a part of the KCMS Sunday Recital Series.

THEATRE 30TH-3RD, ADC

The Oresteia
The Marlowe Society brings Aeschylus's classic to the ADC Theatre for five nights of vengeance, justice and bloodlust.

COMEDY 4TH, ADC BAR

Quickfire: More or Less
The Impronauts attempt to impress you with improvised tales. Don't like 'em? Say the word and a new director will step up.



From our Chief Designer...

Need some artistic inspiration? Our Chief Designer Sophia Luu is here to help

Reading is boring after a while. What I like to do when I can't concentrate any more is to twist the reading on it's head. Pick a nice section – it could be a word or a sentence – from different paragraphs of your reading and turn them into a poem. Then you can illustrate it, and find a whole new dimension to your work. That way, rather than just been a means of doing an essay, your reading can show you all the amazing ways writers approach things differently.



“The key as I see it is ritual”

Grayson Elorreaga unpacks the processes that reinforce addictive behaviour

David Foster Wallace figured that everyone was addicted to something. In light of that, the real question is: what should we be addicted to? Maybe it sounds outlandish to suggest that we *ought* to be addicted to this that or the other thing. But maybe it's also the case that it couldn't be *any other way*. If that's true, what does it say about how we should live our lives? You can't escape routine in some form or another, no matter how adventurous you try to make your life. It's easy to think of routine as a pair of proverbial irons around the ankles, but I've found that in the course of trying to shake some of my own bad habits, positive habit-forming is an invaluable tool in the process of getting your life together.

Especially when we're talking about the pleasant ones.

Dopamine is the big factor in addiction, and it isn't difficult to understand why. It's the hormone that determines behaviour reinforcement. Everything from your little problem with your Instagram feed to a hardcore porn addiction can be understood in terms of dopamine. Here's the bit that gets me most of all: anything really *fun* will involve its interactions in some form or another.

Obviously, there are toxic factors, and quick withdrawal from certain substances can cause serious damage. It can even kill you. Recovering alcoholics are often advised to not go fully cold turkey because of the physiological strain this could cause. In other cases, the intensity of the dopamine hit can

make something far more difficult to kick than otherwise. But the psychology around addiction as we understand it now is clear: dopamine plays a big role, and you can get a dopamine hit from plenty of things other than a key-bump or the odd joint.

Sports seem like a solid answer to the question of: 'how am I going to get my fix today?' I certainly don't mind. It's a preferable option to the alternatives. But it can be anything as simple as cleaning your room or folding your socks. The key as I see it is ritual. Studies show that some of the biggest dopamine hits are results of ritual or preparation rather than the substance itself. Anyone who has tried to quit smoking will know that it's significantly easier to do if you find yourself some other excuse to get your daily fresh air.

Regularity in any form is comforting, it's a fact. It doesn't matter if you're trying to quit hard drugs or cut down on your sugar intake: in the course of changing your habits you're going to experience a little pinch. Finding another, healthier source of comfort can be the necessary bridge over troubled waters.

Sadly, one of the biggest predictors for developing addiction is social isolation. It's well known that during the Vietnam War, plenty of GIs defaulted to readily accessible heroin in order to deal with the trauma and discomfort of their daily lives. It might surprise you to learn that those GIs who returned from overseas to healthy homes and family lives were significantly less likely to continue use compared to those who did not have such happy homes to return to. It seems pretty clear to me that healthy emotional attachment can be a significant predictor for recovery from addictive behaviours.

Social factors play a huge role in matters of addiction. Coming back to our smoking example, I definitely found it easier to quit smoking once I stopped spending so much time with smokers. Not that there's anything wrong with smokers, the problem is that I just got too much dopamine from spending time with them! There's this saying: "Neurons that fire together, wire together." It's really fun and catchy, but there's serious truth in it. Positive social interactions lead to some of the larger dopamine releases; this is how you catch yourself living the life of a 'social' smoker.

It's no lie that we live the high life in a number of respects here at the good ol' University of Cambridge. But we also live stressful, and at times very lonely lives due to the sheer volume of work that each of us are saddled with on a daily basis. Contrary to the intuition, people don't form negative addictions for no reason and then start living a bad life because of the addiction. They form addictions because they're *already* living bad lives. Bad can mean stressful, and it can also mean lonely.

As an American looking in over the course of the last twelve-or-so-years, I've grown to fear and respect the mighty British drinking culture, especially as it is manifested among the student population. If you know someone at risk, the best thing to give them might just be a bit of unconditional care ●

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SOPHIA LUU

Ana Ovey

Grief can be easier with Bob Dylan blowin' in the wind



I have a handful of close friends who were able to provide me with glimmers of catharsis during grief-slumps at Cambridge. These were best friends, or people going through similar bereavements. But in my total aversion to disclosing the personal with new friends, I failed to consider the possibility that any one of them may be enduring precisely what I was — and feeling, no doubt, unable to vocalise their own isolation.

The notion that beyond my circle of friends, hundreds of students in the same university will be grieving not only for a parent but for a sibling, a cousin, or a best friend was a reminder I sorely needed. It's easy to forget, but *nobody* is exempt from personal tragedy. And more people than I knew were bereaved, struggling to balance work and heartache, and just as needy of emotional outlets as I was.

Of course, we all mourn in different ways. But seeing one of my friends share a playlist dedicated to her father after his death, I considered that, of all outlets, art is one of the most profoundly intimate.

Heartbreak inevitably lifts veils of understanding that often shroud music, film, literature. After my dad died, I listened in particular to three songs almost on repeat, feeling an unfamiliar sensation of both help and hurt as I did so. I continue to listen to them now: Leon Bridges, *River*; Bob Dylan, *Don't Think Twice, It's Alright*; and *The Sound of Music's Edelweiss*.

There were other songs, too, and I'm sure I will discover or recall new songs with the progression of time. But in the early weeks of Michaelmas term, unwilling to broach the subject of death yet again with old friends, and unable to share it with new, I turned consistently to artistic expression for relief. Formal words alone cannot render grief as understood, nor can they communicate it. But art has always tapped into the sorrows of the human soul to express them in astute and unexpected ways. Why else should we tear up at Auld Lang Syne? There are things of which we cannot speak—not from choice but from capacity. These marked the absolute limits of my honesty with friends and family. And yet the intimacy of art has a corrosive effect on emotional blockades.

Not a week goes by when I don't listen to Bob Dylan.

We have a friend whose husband died several years ago, now, who finds herself unable to listen to certain songs she listened to with her husband, so overwhelmed is she with emotion. Heartbreak is a funny thing. I learned that my dad had died via phone call a week after I had set off for a six-month trip to Australia. Days later, on an emergency flight

home, I found that though *The Sound of Music* was a featured film on the flight, I couldn't watch it. Even the title screen hurt to look at. I settled on *Mary Poppins* — essentially subbing one Julie Andrews film for another. I still cried inexplicably.

Loss makes us rethink art. But, as is in the paradoxical nature of grief, art inevitably makes us rethink loss. Sometimes conversations — however supportive — simply cannot do the same.

I, too, have a playlist entitled *Dad*. There are songs I listen to that I never got the chance to listen to with him. They still provide the strange kind of relief the other songs on the playlist afford. There are words that act as reminders, words that act as my own — though I never could have rendered them — words that act as a chance for renewal. Equally, there are films I watch because I watched them with him; not at all highbrow, not remotely emotional, that in watching make me feel closer to him. There are films I watch now which make me weep all the more because of their new context, just as there are narratives I watch and rewatch to help me understand my own.

We grieve in different ways. But art helps. To those mourning: immerse yourself in it, however briefly. Cry or laugh or cringe at the favourite film of the person you miss. Sob or smile to their most beloved song. One of the Latin words I remember my dad hammering home to me — hilariously, as we watched *The Island* — was *renovatio*: renewal. Friends, art, nature, memory — these are what provide us with that. And this is how, in Cambridge, of all places, we carry on in spite of tragedy ●



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Film & TV

Breaking Bryan Cranston

Lillian Crawford sits down with the Oscar-nominated actor to talk plays, misogyny, and animated dogs



A prospective law enforcement officer turned actor, Bryan Cranston's life sounds like the narrative of one of his dramas. Only rising to prominence in his forties as Hal in *Malcolm in the Middle*, much of it was spent out of the spotlight. "No one ever tells you how to handle 'celebrity'", he says, although today one cannot enter an entertainment retailer without seeing caricatures of his face emblazoning doormats, mugs, and t-shirts. His Union talk clearly a part of a hectic schedule, I manage to squeeze in a couple more questions before he is hurried out of sight.

Cranston is not unaware of his talents, and while he puts a lot of his fame down to Vince Gilligan's phenomenal series *Breaking Bad*, he knows the part he played in cementing its success. He is currently leading a sold-out production of *Network* at the National Theatre, and now claims that he wants to turn to writing for the



stage himself. "I love all aspects of storytelling, and I like to challenge myself," he confidently asserts. He tells me that he cares little for the quality of his piece provided it gives him a chance to find out his skills in the field. Rather than seeing it as "a stepping stone to something else", it is about seeking opportunity and learning from the experience.

Such an ethic might be applied to the Weinstein Effect currently tearing down the more corrupt aspects of Hollywood, which Cranston seems entirely optimistic about. "I think it's wonderful," he reveals, a sense of earnestness in his voice. It is apposite to raise the subject, visiting Cambridge on a day when many students wore black in solidarity with the Time's Up campaign. "Sometimes you can't have a breakthrough without going through a breakdown" – perhaps Cranston's sermon goes beyond the film industry to a lesson for all of society, to bring about a new age of "mutual respect".

Indeed, Cranston appears to always have his mind on the bigger picture. Inquiring after his role as Chief in Wes Anderson's upcoming animation *Isle of Dogs*, he stated that "what's so great about it is that it's imperfect – art is

“As long as we artists move people to some emotion then I take that as a victory”

imperfect, and it's not absolute." Those looking forward to the film might find this a slightly ambiguous statement, Anderson being celebrated for his exquisite production design and dialogue. Cranston revealed that the actors were given pages of script as they went along without ever receiving a complete story. He said that Anderson was even keen to take his own notes on-board as the film was being made. It seems that when it premieres at the Berlin Film Festival, that glorious ensemble cast will be as uninformed as the rest of Anderson's fans.

Convinced of aesthetic subjectivity, Cranston's sanguinity is rather infectious. His belief that "everyone is correct" would probably render film criticism pointless if it were true, but he still admits that the best art will inspire debate. Reflecting on the release of *Trumbo*, he found that playing the blacklisted screenwriter was worth it for the seed he planted into conversation. "As long as we artists move people to some emotion, whatever that is, then I take that as a victory." Given the cheers at the end of his talk from a packed Union building, it would seem that Cranston is a man who knows what he is talking about ●

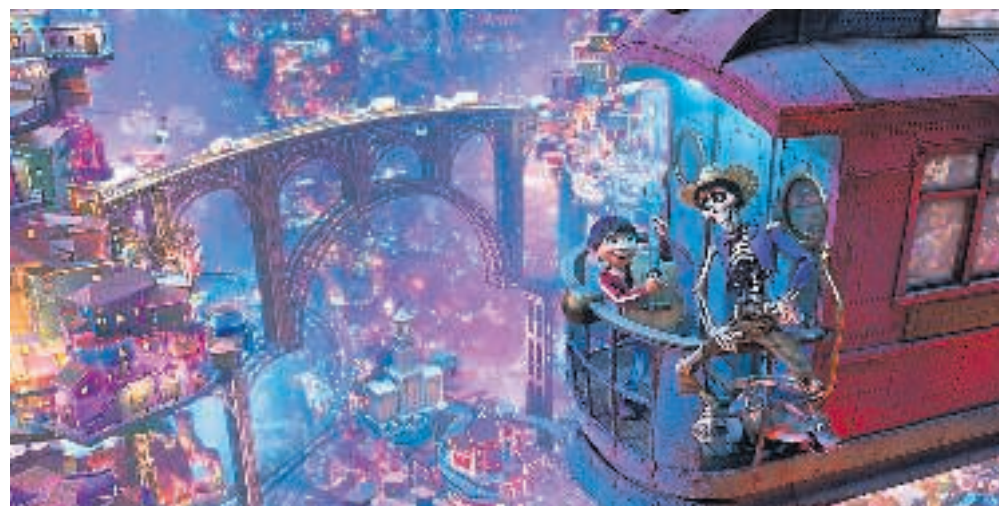
REVIEW

Coco

Dir. Lee Unkrich
In cinemas now

★★★

Miguel, the single-dimpled protagonist of Pixar's latest vindication of the law of diminishing returns, is an appealing sort. He does not have all that much in the way of distinguishing characteristics, but he is peppy, earnest, and crucially is not forced to spend the film receiving a series of trite life lessons. One understands completely his obsession with the Mexican Elvis Presley-type Ernesto de la Cruz, and the destruction of his beloved guitar at the hands of his disapproving grandmother is consequently a distressing moment. For all Miguel's strengths as a character, the film in which he finds himself is sadly, for the most part, a humdrum affair. The comedy, barring one half-decent gag about a dentist, is decidedly uninspired. Jokes involving, for instance, skeletons' want of noses, and the existence of a substantial bureaucracy in the Land of the Dead, are passed over quickly, suggesting a lack of conviction on the part of the filmmakers. The tiddlers in the auditorium



“Its relationship with the Día de Muertos rather resembles a fetish”

were certainly held rapt, but the dearth of giggles was noticeable.

The film's noble intentions as a positive presentation of Mexican culture undoubtedly inhibit the entertainment. The film is unsure, for example, whether an encounter with Frida Kahlo should be respectful or satirical. In the end, naturally, it manages to be neither. Kahlo comes off as an impenetrably pretentious egoist, yet her papaya and cactus performance piece is not absurd enough to generate even the slightest snigger. Some might find themselves caught up in the film's anthropological angle; however, its relationship with the *Día de Muertos* rather resembles a fetish.

▲ **Hector inspires within Miguel a lust for music and life** (WALT DISNEY MOTION PICTURES)

The plot lurches from manufactured crisis to manufactured crisis, the strain put on the simple 'can he make it to Ernesto de la Cruz by sunrise?' premise resulting in several tiresomely needless scenes. The failure of the villain simply to rip into pieces a crucial item proved a source of immense frustration.

Talent contests, meanwhile, do not behave Pixar; often, *Coco* seems dispiritingly bog-standard, reeling out ideas encountered time and again in the works of lesser animation studios. The little heralded Chinese-American production *Rock Dog*, for instance, also focussed on a talented guitarist electing to pursue his dream in spite of his family's ban on music per se. The alebrijes, or spirit creatures, to be found in the Land of the Dead, moreover, are less enchanting than the bioluminescent rabbits from *Smurfs: The Lost Village*.

There is assuredly little joy to be had in *Coco*, but as a weepie, it functions well. The melancholic musical numbers are simple ditties, but powerful ones, powerfully performed by the film's cast.

Pangs are in plentiful supply towards the film's conclusion, and the viewer should be prepared for jolts and twinges. If *Coco* were half as exciting or amusing as it is affecting, it would be a formidable proposition. As it is, it is a mundane movie with a half-decent main character who is occasionally capable of stirring one's heart, in between the bits with the slobbery dog ● **Hugh Oxlade**

Arts

Yes, Donald Trump is a conceptual artist



◀ **Prototype slabs of the US-Mexico border wall**

(FLICKR: U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION)

“
Büchel is
a foreigner
pressuring a
government into
conforming with
his desires as an
outsider
”

keep the statues remaining, namely, for the historical record. Also, given the petition is not openly political, arguments about whether it should be torn down in the future for an altering moral code should be eschewed. The right may view the prototypes as a historical artefact, whereas the left may view it as a solemn reminder of the xenophobia permeating through the American public at this time. They are not just a 30-foot-tall sight gag, they are a considered statement, with the meaning of the artwork so clearly coming from the viewer.

Büchel's work is not the only artistic petition, as another conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer requested that the land artist Christo build the wall as a new version of his Running Fence (1972-76) – a temporary installation piece which involved a white fabric fence extended across the hills of northern California. But Büchel's work stands apart as it lacks the gimmicky overttness of the other art, as well as raising questions of how meaning and value are ascribed, and by whom.

The wall prototypes reflect values chosen and voted for by the American people: Trump's monoliths, for better or worse, embody the America of today ●

James Dickinson celebrates Christoph Büchel's petition to recognise Trump's Mexican border wall as art

With over twenty-five cities in the US having removed Confederate statues in 2017, debates about history and politics in public art have never raged as fiercely as they do today. It is therefore unsurprising that conceptual artist Christoph Büchel's online petition to have Trump's border wall prototypes recognised as Land Art and declared a national monument has caught public attention.

The eight test walls bear a striking resemblance to both American twentieth-century minimalist art and Kubrick's monoliths in 2001: A Space Odyssey. Yet for all the sparseness of the prototypes, they embody a meteoric change in American history – akin to how we view Stonehenge within human history – and can be viewed as a great work of land art itself.

Büchel claims the works are apolitical, asserting that the artistic value of the monoliths should be assessed purely in aesthetic terms. But even the aesthetics of this work are political, as the domineering forms disrupt the surrounding desert and cloudless sky. The official design criteria are even more politically charged. The wall only has one visual requirement: that the side facing the US be “aesthetically pleasing”, with no such considerations being made for the side facing Mexico. One of the prototypes, costing \$470,000 and made by Texas Sterling Construction, features an arguably pleasant

stone facade, while concrete and razor wire greet the eyes of Mexican viewers.

Being Swiss-Icelandic, Büchel is not directly affected by the sculpture. Thus his project is initially surprising. “My political position, that's not interesting in this context,” he tells the *New York Times*. This seems fairly obvious. Büchel is a foreigner pressuring a government into conforming with his desires as an outsider. This is reminiscent of analogous situations of the US thrusting its ideals onto other nations, or the pertinence of the US forcing the wall onto the Mexican people. Perhaps the most interesting part of the petition is the artist: Büchel rejects credibility, recognising Trump and his American supporters as the authors of the work instead. There is a long tradition of appropriation in the art world with figures like Marcel Duchamp and Richard Prince using pre-existing objects or images in their work. However, where these figures almost invariably take credit as creator, Büchel violates this norm, reminding us that the responsibility for the border lies with the American people, and not himself.

The petition has been met with some criticism, mostly for its lack of an overt political statement. Andrea Alessi of *Artslant* criticised Büchel for failing to take a political stance, denigrating it as a mere PR stunt. While Büchel has a history of provocative art (for the 2015 Venice Biennale he commissioned a mosque to be built inside the walls of a former Catholic church) the subtlety of the current work shows great personal artistic growth.

Considering recent discussions about Confederate monuments, it is evident that the wall fulfils the arguments used by Republicans to



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Music

William Poulos

Can songwriters be poets?



Despite being praised as a poet by eminent literary critic Christopher Ricks, Bob Dylan is famous as one of the best songwriters of the 20th century. The Nobel Prize committee carefully explained its decision to award him the 2016 Nobel Prize for literature in anticipation of the clerisy's qualified disbelief: sure, he's a great songwriter, but songs are not poems.

Some of Dylan's admirers were quick to point out that the distinction of songs and poems occurred only recently: in classical Greece, poems were either sung by the poet or skilled performers; Petrarch, one of the most important figures of the Renaissance, addresses those who 'sing' his scattered rhymes; and poets of the 19th century are said to have "chaunted" or "intoned" their poems when reciting them. Dylan's literary award, and the publication of his and other songwriters' lyrics in book form, seems to reforge the broken link between poetry and song.

Paradoxically, the division between written poetry and songs also occurred rather early: the Latin poetry of the first century AD is full of references to writers and readers, not singers and hearers.

While songs and poems share many characteristics – rhyme and rhythm – there are things one can do which the other cannot. Even poets who consciously associated their poems with songs illustrate this. John Keats, whose favourite topic of conversation was described as "melody in verse," called some of his best poems Odes (from the Greek verb meaning 'to sing') and in one of them refers to himself as a singer. The Odes rhyme, have a regular rhythm, and most of them consist of identical stanzas, resembling verses in a song. Yet they cannot be effective songs: the syntax is too complicated, and the images too detailed.

One can grumble that songs are only about a few different topics, or that they're repetitive, but this is necessarily so. A song exists only as it's being sung, so its lyrics must be intelligible and affecting on first hearing; they cannot be reread. The music compensates for this simplicity, which is why even the best lyrics are dull when read. Poems, on the other hand, must have their own music, which is why adding a melody to them is often excessive, like adding glitter to a painting.

“Poems are bound to their authors in a way that songs are not”

Poems, also, are bound to their authors in a way that songs are not. Everyone knows that Edgar Allan Poe wrote “quoth the raven, nevermore,” but how many people know who wrote a song that everyone can sing, such as ‘I’ve Got You Under My Skin’? When people hear it, they think of Frank Sinatra, who sang the most famous recording, but Cole Porter wrote it, yet it doesn’t seem his. You and I can sing ‘I’ve Got You Under My Skin’ without thinking of Sinatra or Porter because songs are collectively owned.

The idea of the singer/songwriter complicates this a little: ‘Blowin’ In The Wind’ can’t help but bring Dylan to mind, yet it retains a certain impersonality. No matter who wrote them, lyrics seem to speak for their audience and not to it: have you ever disagreed with a song? When Chris Martin from Coldplay sings ‘Fix You’ we don’t imagine that he’s singing to us; we imagine that, with him, we’re singing to our (sometimes imaginary) lover or friend.

Modern poets could win back their audience by writing more songlike lines. Ronsard’s advice to young poets was to recite your lines aloud, or even better, sing them. Yet poems and songs are different things, and reach their goals differently. Great lyrics are an achievement which do not need praise from the literary world, either by receiving awards or being called a poem. The palm should go to the poem which, because it is so easy to quote and memorise, can be called a song ●

► Keats was a master of ‘melody in verse’ (WILLIAM HILTON)



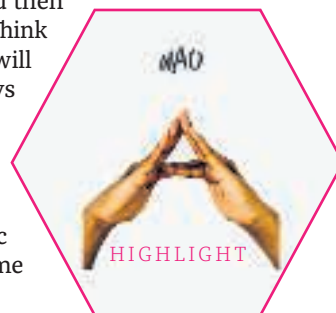
Vulture

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Flume,

Dave Glass Animals

The Trouble With Us
Marcus Marr,
Chet Faker

So Good
NAO,
A. K. Paul

More Than Me
Eliphino

Can't Do (Blinkie remix)
Everything
Everything

HyperParadise (Flume remix)
Hermitude



'Genuinely annoying' Fall Out Boy fail to impress

Fall Out Boy have evidently come a long way since 'Headfirst Slide Into Cooperstown On A Bad Bet' or 'I'm Like A Lawyer With The Way I'm Always Trying To Get You Off (Me & You)'. No longer are we subjected to largely indecipherable lyrics that impressionable *Kerrang!* readers will paste all over their rooms and themselves. No, no, no. Now we have hard-hitting, *inspirational* words. Words for Coachella ghouls to try vainly to mouth along to while filming themselves at the show.

"*Champion, champion*" goes the lead single. Lyricist Pete Wentz has associated these words from 'Champion' with his own 'champions', such as Nelson Mandela. This is such a ripe target for ridicule that one can only hope that it's steeped in some perverse irony. For a band that once removed the vowels from the title of perhaps their biggest song, 'Thnks Fr Th Mmrs,' to mock the record label checking them for their verbose track listings, this is what is known as *selling out*.

It is regarded as far too hyperbolic today to say that someone has sold out. Well, Fall Out



MANIA

Fall Out Boy
Island Records

★★★★★

Boy sold out. It certainly hasn't done them any harm to sell out, racking up countless 'Best International Rock Band' awards from homogenous radio stations, performing large arena tours with bargain bin rappers, all with the sneaky notion hidden in the back of their minds that if it doesn't work out, and the Spotify hits for their new simplistic adventures begin to grind to a halt, there is always the prospect of an *Infinity on High* album tour and an accompanying 'back-to-basics' release.

What happened Pete? In Fall Out Boy's first incarnation, they had a supreme knack for combining odd lyrics with inventive and catchy melodies. With 2013's comeback record *Save Rock and Roll*, that all got thrown out in favour of uninspired pop songs.

Ultimately in Fall Out Boy's case it's not 'going pop' that causes the damage, but rather the greedy desire to have the best of both worlds; to make a move for the cool kids while still hanging out with the old ones in case things don't work out. Look at guitarist Joe Trohman wielding his axe with vigour - but hang on... there's no audible guitar. Perhaps he hasn't been plugged in? Then it hits you. It's all a ploy, the instruments all props. Boys, if you want to make loud pop songs, that's fine, but it's simply insulting waving around guitars when all we can hear is lame dancehall.

But perhaps the core reason why the songs on *MANIA* are so genuinely annoying is

because they're just not very good. There is a cryptic backstory to this album where the band either delayed the release because they considered it not to be up to scratch, or because lead single 'Young and Menace' tanked. Whatever was altered on the album, it still sounds like an undignified, incoherent mess. The 'big choruses' that every song builds up to amid a succession of predictable jittery beats are the most crushingly dull and repetitive examples of their type. Opening the album, 'Young and Menace' has to be applauded here for at least sounding bizarrely yet unsuccessfully bonkers compared to the snooze-fests that are the aforementioned 'Champion' or 'Bishops Knife Trick'. 'Church' defines the general lowest common denominator appeal by having irritating church bells clanging around throughout. 'The Last of the Real Ones' is marginally better in a Europop sort of way but doesn't really connect.

And yet, this is the band that made 'Sugar We're Goin' Down' and the vastly underrated *Folie à Deux*. Deep in there, the real Fall Out Boy must be straining for freedom. On *MANIA* it surfaces in the form of 'Wilson (Expensive Mistakes)' with a soaring chorus distinct from the other disappointingly cynical ones, and a performance from Stump thankfully not distorted with a vicious assault of grating vocal modulations. They're still in there. Who knows if they'll ever emerge again ● Miles Ricketts



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Theatre

The future is relaxed



The Relaxed Theatre Company explain the importance of producing accessible theatre

Last year, Cambridge Arts Theatre put up three relaxed performances of their Christmas pantomime, *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Two shows were for local schools, and one (performed at 11am on a Saturday) for the general public. During the course of last year, they also performed relaxed versions of two other shows, *The Gruffalo* and *Awful Auntie*. Relaxed performances are generally created for Autistic audiences (although often extended to include those with Down's Syndrome, Tourette's Syndrome, and other developmental disabilities). The performances alter sound and lighting levels, leave house lights on dim, and allow free movement within and outside of the auditorium during the show. They also provide additional information and well-trained staff to help disabled audience members to understand the pre-show process, and enter the theatre peacefully.

At the Relaxed Theatre Company, we feel these performances should be moving more into the mainstream. Although the movement has progressed significantly in the last decade, there is still a long way to go. With few exceptions, relaxed performances are usually targeted at primary school-aged children, and these performances are incredibly important. Young disabled people are already often left out of activities neurotypical children take for granted, and theatre is no exception. Complex social cues and amplified lights and sounds can make generic theatre distressing and downright frightening. For children coming to terms with their disabilities, theatre and its novel narratives can and should be a comfort in the confusing world of neurotypicality. Relaxed Theatre makes this possible, and thus allows more children to enjoy theatre.

Yet, by allowing the relaxed theatre industry to be dominated by children's theatre, perhaps we are only revealing deeper problems with

the way we view disabled adults. By refusing to create adult art in which Autistic and other developmentally disabled people can participate, are we not suggesting that we believe (as much of the global population do) that they are essentially children? Infantilisation and dehumanisation are rife; we rob neurodiverse adults of autonomy, speak over them, and essentially treat them as sub-human.

It's a difficult and fractious issue. Current efforts to make theatre more accessible are undoubtedly wonderful: I feel incredibly happy that my children will be able to enjoy West-End shows and Christmas pantomimes in a way I never could. But we, as theatre lovers, need to acknowledge that accessibility, and true disability activism, should be universal: applied to theatre-goers of all ages and shows of all types.

Is it time to do away with strobe lighting? Should every show have a space outside the theatre where people can go, mid-show? Should we be insisting every disabled character be played by a disabled actor, and do away with Curious Incident-style 'inspo porn', where abled people walk away feeling they've done their bit for the disabled community simply by watching the show, without any commitment from the writers or theatres to cast or even liaise with real Autistic adults?

As active participants in the theatre scene, we can all contribute more to existing efforts that are bringing Relaxed Theatre to the mainstream. I would urge any budding theatre-maker to seriously consider improving accessibility measures in their shows, and to think critically about the roles and implications their shows impose upon the disabled community. *The Relaxed Theatre Company perform Any Little Thing at Fitzpatrick Hall, 24-27 January* ●

Georgina Evans

“It's a difficult and fractious issue”

Off the page

Beatriz Santos gives eight ways to breathe life into your reading list

As every English student knows, holiday equals tackling a reading list. Boggled down with the sheer number of books, it can be easy to forget that the plays you are reading in preparation for academic study were in fact designed to exist alive, on the stage. So here are some of the things you can do, a lot of them for free, to bridge the divide between the written and the 'living' drama.

1. Youtube There is a wealth of productions online, including old BBC TV adaptations. Further pleasure can be derived from watching clips: you can quickly compare Laurence Olivier, Christopher Plummer, David Tennant and Maxine Peak all playing Hamlet. There are lots of snippets promoting modern productions: watching these short interviews with actors and directors can give you a flavour of the performance.

2. DVDs Sounds obvious enough, but why read a Shakespeare play when you can watch a film adaptation or a recorded production at The Globe? The English Faculty Library has a great stock of DVDs. Personally, I prefer a good jig after any performance: *The Taming of the Shrew* (2013) and *Twelfth Night* (2012) are favourites.

3. Read aloud Gather a group of willing friends (i.e. fellow English students), sit in a garden if it's sunny, or, more realistically, with hot chocolates on the sofa. Assign yourself different characters, and prepare yourselves for some comic doublings along the way...

4. Put on a play This was perhaps only socially acceptable before the age of 10. Luckily for us in Cambridge, amateur theatricals is taken to the next level: what better way to get your head around a play than to direct it?

5. Go see a show This is probably the most expensive

option. Try exploring a new venue or company; these are often cheaper. Make use of youth passes: you can purchase tickets for five pounds if you are under 25 for example, the National Theatre. There are countless annual theatre festivals all over the UK if you want something close to home or the excuse to travel!

6. Cinema and Archives National Theatre Live broadcasts performances to cinemas all around the world.

The next play coming up, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* directed by Benedict Andrews, will be in cinemas on 22 February 2018.

You can also pop along to the National Theatre on Southbank and request to view film footage of any production since the company began in 1963! If you live in London, make sure to make use of their wonderful archive.

7. The body An actor acts, primarily, with his body. Being aware of posture, expression, slapstick, and choreography are all important ways to assess a performance. Bodies that are sadly always absent on the page become incredibly important in their own clunky or delicate way onstage, so make sure to assess the physical in performance!



8. History of performance. Did you know that *The Tempest* was originally performed by candlelight? Or that they used real horses and even deer in Victorian productions of Shakespeare? Learning about productions throughout the ages can provide delightful insights into how plays were experienced. The Elizabethans, for example, went along to see fireworks, sumptuous costumes and bloodbaths.

Oh, and they also enjoyed soliloquies, I suppose ●



Footlights Presents: Pen Pals
ADC Theatre
11pm, 31 January - 3 February

▲ **This sketch show certainly promises fun (Robert Eager)**

“I’d just like to say that I think this whole experience has been one of friendship”. This is not the opening remark of the *Footlights Presents: Pen Pals* cast, but the one that comes when I prod them for final comments on their show experience. It’s delivered by Emmeline Downie with deep sincerity, but the resulting howls of laughter from her fellow cast members – as well as Director Molly Stacey and Assistant Director Ania Magliano-Wright – indicate it’s only half serious. Predictably for seven of Cambridge’s best

and most seasoned comedians, what they love to do the most is laugh – and they never hesitate to. In fact, directing on Stacey’s part during this rehearsal seems, amusingly, like controlling a group of very enthusiastic and capable children. “We keep them on a tight leash,” she tells me. The job of a Director in a sketch show, I’m informed, is broadly different to directing an already scripted show. “In comedy you always need an extra eye,” says Magliano-Wright. “Not necessarily one of any particular skill, just one that has a different point of view and different ideas.” Both she and Molly came onto the show after material had already begun to be written, making their work less about creative control and more about leading the conversations which, when you put the entire cast together, seem to always be in full flow.

Funded by the Cambridge Footlights, this show provides audiences with the rare and exciting occurrence of a high-budget sketch show. The cast are keenly aware of this, in ways that vary from ordering their own embroidered polo shirts for costume to having recruited two musicians to help bring their show to life. The two-person band brings a wonderful musicality to the songs written for the show, and they take particular joy in translating the performers’ gut feelings into harmony and melody. The result is songs such as ‘Dear Pen Pal’ and ‘One Night Stand’ which elevate themselves beyond ‘sketch songs’, to

music that is witty beyond merely its lyrics.

I ask the performers how they want their audience to leave feeling leaving the theatre. “Wholesome LOLs,” says Bella Hull concisely. “LOLsome,” Downie appends, even more concisely. “It’s about friendship,” elaborates Noah Geelan – and that’s the buzzword that gets them all going, each expanding further with their own words that link back to key ideas of friendship, loneliness, connecting and reconnecting. It’s a theme that is pleasantly light and yet somehow also earnest. Looking at the sheer amount of sketches that the performers have come up with, it’s clear to see that this broadness has translated to the theme of letters.

Each performer has their own monologue, in addition to sketches of various forms – songs, shorts, ‘vox pops’ (one-liners to throw at the audience), and sketches with intriguing titles such as ‘Gareth of Unlimited Potential’ and ‘The Queen gets a Buzz Cut’. Whether singing, dancing, or delivering sharp one-liners, the ‘Pals’ take to their work with unmitigated enthusiasm and palpable love for each other and the work they’ve created together. “Thank you, Footlights, for presenting us!” Leo declares half-jokingly. But the pleasure is bound to be all theirs, and that of any audience who take an hour out of their evening to partake in the ‘wholesome LOLs’ that this group have created ●

Mariam Abdel-Razek

Kulture reviews

Piranha Heights

19.45, ADC Theatre

★★★★☆

There is a War

19.00, Corpus Playroom

★★★★☆

Conviction

21.30, Corpus Playroom

★★★★☆

Let’s start at the very beginning Tom Hiddleston in *Romeo & Juliet*



As a young Classics undergrad, Tom Hiddleston’s rendition of Romeo in the Cambridge Arts Theatre Show was reviewed in a *Varsity* article back in 2001. The actor is pictured staring lovingly into his Juliet’s (Lydia Fox) eyes and his performance was praised as being “polished and unobtrusive”. While Hiddleston clearly impressed the reviewer as “a Romeo who really can vault over orchard walls as if on the wings of love”, Lydia Fox (also now a professional actor) seemingly left a lot to be desired. The reviewer appeared to find her performance over zealous and almost comical as she wrote of her “chasing Romeo round the bed after their night together”; a line normally laden with emotion, “wherefore art thou Romeo?”, apparently elicited a titter from the audience.

Star of *The Night Manager*, *Thor* and *The Avengers* films, Hiddleston began his acting career at Cambridge; this week, 17 years

later, the Cambridge Arts Theatre again hosts a student performance of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. This performance is led by the Marlowe Society, which was founded in 1907, and has produced many distinguished renditions of Shakespeare plays over the years, including a *Romeo and Juliet* which was watched by Winston Churchill and an *Edward II* in 1958 which was broadcast by the BBC.

The Marlowe Society also boasts several noteworthy alumni such as Sir Ian McKellen, Rachel Weisz and James Norton, all of whom have lent their voices to a recorded reading of the play’s prologue for next week’s production. This year’s directive team have opted for a performance influenced by Carmen and Lorca; no doubt the 2018 rendition will prove as “imaginative” and “effortless” as Hiddleston’s did 17 years ago.

Romeo and Juliet runs at the Cambridge Arts Theatre until Saturday 27 January ●

Francesca Vella-Bonnici

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Drugs cheats should not be denied the opportunity to fight their corner

Ben Cisneros
Sport Columnist

In the media frenzy that is modern sport, the term 'drugs cheat' is bandied about an awful lot. Every positive test, every 'adverse finding', and every doping ban leads to a swirling storm of rumours, opinions, and headlines which ruin an athlete's reputation in an instant. Athletes that cheat are those who dishonestly attempt to gain an advantage through rule-breaking. Contrary to popular belief, relatively few bans are handed out for such dishonesty, and yet 'drugs cheat' is repeatedly used to refer to anyone who has been convicted of an anti-doping violation. This needs to change.

Unlike in criminal law, athletes suspected of breaking anti-doping rules are not innocent until proven guilty; they are presumed guilty. Under the World Anti-Doping Agency Code, "it is each athlete's personal duty to ensure that no Prohibited Substance enters his or her body". Accordingly, "it is not necessary that intent, fault, negligence or knowing use" be demonstrated to establish a violation. Thus, upon returning an "Adverse Analytical Finding", it is extremely difficult to avoid punishment – and the resulting media backlash.

Given the absolute need to ensure a level playing field, the reasons for this rule are clear. However, it means athletes are sometimes punished despite having no intention to enhance their performance.

Justin Gatlin, perhaps more than anyone, can attest to this. When he won Gold in the 100m at the World Athletics Championships last year, he was booed by the London crowd. Many people – myself included – thought the result a disgrace. How dare he, one of the sport's most infamous "drugs cheats", ruin Bolt's fairy-tale ending?!

Yet, after reading *Demonising Justin Gatlin* by sports lawyer Mike Morgan, I was appalled – at myself, for having scorned what was a stunning victory. Despite continually calling him a "two-times drugs cheat", few know Gatlin's full story.

According to the authorities, his first violation was "at most, a technical or a paperwork" violation, after amphetamine from his attention deficit disorder medication showed up in an in-competition test, despite him having stopped taking it days before. As such, he received a mandatory two-year ban. However, the anti-doping panel stated Gatlin was "certainly not a doper":

"This Panel is very concerned that Mr Gatlin's reputation not be unnecessarily tarnished as a result of this decision... Mr Gatlin neither cheated nor did he intend to cheat. He did not intend to enhance his performance nor, given his medical condition, did his medication in fact enhance his performance..."

Two months later, the IAAF reinstated Gatlin with immediate effect.

Then, in 2006, he was banned again after testing positive for exogenous testosterone. Gatlin claimed he was sabotaged by his physical therapist, with



whom he was in a financial dispute, and who, the night before the competition, allegedly applied a different product to Gatlin's legs. Having been tested on another 34 occasions, before and after the competition, not one of which indicated the presence of testosterone, his claim was "far from frivolous". As one panel-member noted, "if sabotage did occur, it would more than likely be impossible for Mr Gatlin to prove".

Therefore, though he is repeatedly labelled a "drugs cheat", it has never been proven Gatlin is anything other than an honest athlete, something he maintains to this day. Why else would a man with nothing left to lose continue to proclaim his innocence?

Unfortunately, he is not alone. In 2013, the Athlete Ombudsman for the US Olympic Committee revealed 40-60% of US doping cases are inadvertent, a trend which is seen worldwide.

Tyson Fury provides just the latest example. He tested positive in February 2015 for nandrolone, a compound naturally produced by the body in small amounts but which, in large amounts, indicates steroid use. However, it is scientifically proven that eating red meat can also lead to increased nandrolone levels. As Fury had been eating large amounts of offal (uncastrated wild boar) while training in France, this was the only explanation he could offer. Subsequent tests were all negative which, given intravenous steroids often take time to leave the body, further corroborated his claims. There was, again, far from frivolous evidence suggesting he did not cheat.

And yet, when news of the back-dated two-year ban broke, the *Telegraph* saw fit

"We should never jump to conclusions when we hear athletes have failed a drugs test"

to publish an article that actively called for Fury to be called a "drugs cheat", a term it also stated is not "incorrect or unwarranted" when applied to Justin Gatlin. It is, frankly, lazy journalism bordering on defamatory.

The list of those whose reputations have been tarnished goes on.

Maria Sharapova was labelled a "drugs cheat" when she received a two-year ban in 2016, having taken meldonium, a drug which was legal for years and whose performance-enhancing effects are strongly doubted. It is taken by many people in Eastern Europe due to reported health benefits, but was added to the prohibited list in January 2016, without prior warning to athletes, despite the fact it can take months to be excreted by the body.

▲ Justin Gatlin has been cast as the villain of world athletics for much of his career

(KENT CAPTURE)

► Russian Maria Sharapova is just one of a number of athletes who have faced unchallenged accusations of doping

(JUSTIN SMITH)

Sharapova, who had taken the drug over a long period of time, tested positive in January 2016, along with many other Russian athletes, including swimmer Yuliya Efimova, who was booed by spectators and criticised by competitors on her return at the Rio Olympics. She had last taken the drug in 2015, when it was legal.

Mamadou Sakho, Lizzie Armitstead, Kasul Perera, and Patrick Tuipulotu are another four athletes whose reputations have been called into question, only to have their cases thrown out due to mistakes by the anti-doping authorities. We should never jump to conclusions when we hear athletes have failed a drugs test.

Yet, when it was revealed Chris Froome had failed a drugs test, people immediately wrote him off, and called for him to be removed from Sports Personality of the Year. He maintains he did not exceed the permitted salbutamol dose, and is arguing the test result must have been caused by his liver failing to process it properly. Indeed, there is no evidence salbutamol has any performance-enhancing benefits, other than allowing asthmatics to reach the same level as non-asthmatics. Until it is proven otherwise, Froome is not a "drugs cheat".

Of course, for those who do intentionally seek to enhance their performance, there can be no defence. Lance Armstrong deserved the punishment he received, and cannot argue with being called a "drugs cheat". As he admitted, his career was "one big lie". However, there is a big difference between him and Gatlin, Fury, Sharapova or Froome.

The media are all too quick to spread the populist view on doping violations. High-profile cheating cases, like Armstrong's, have created the idea that anyone who breaches the rules must be a cheat, meaning athletes are forever being unfairly demonised. This is an attitude we need to change.

Next time you read that a player has failed a drugs test, or has received a doping ban, at least pause to consider that it may not be a cut-and-dried case. Don't jump to conclusions. And maybe have a little look into it.



Drugs Scandal: Should all athletes banned for doping be labelled as “drugs cheats”? **31**



CUHC

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OUHC

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Dark Blues flick their way to victory

Vivi Way
Deputy Sport Editor

After a 2-0 loss against Oxford earlier in the season, Cambridge women's Blues hockey were hoping for a change of fortunes when the Dark Blues visited Wilberforce Road. This was their last chance to practice against their Oxford counterparts before their Varsity game in five weeks' time.

Oxford started the first half very aggressively and won a short corner within the first couple of minutes. The resulting drag flick was well-saved by goalkeeper Freddie Briscoe, but was a sign of the dominance that Oxford would assert for the rest of the half and that ultimately would carry them to victory.

Another theme of the game was very quick counter-attacking play from both sides. The first of these was made by Cambridge, after a crash ball found Annalise Whitehead alone in the shooting circle, only for her shot to fire wide. However, this was a rare venture towards the opposition's goal for Cambridge in the first half, as their final passes kept going awry.

Oxford's relentless pressure and superior speed eventually told when one of their forwards won a short corner after a quick break down the right-hand flank. Oxford's drag-flicker stepped up

again, but Briscoe made three fantastic saves to keep the ball out, which on the final time hit a defender's foot and resulted in another short corner.

It was third time lucky for the drag-flicker whose powerful strike went straight into the left-hand corner and gave Oxford a deserved lead. This was to be a lead the Dark Blues would not relinquish for the rest of the contest.

As the game went on, Oxford forwards kept sprinting past Cambridge's defence. Briscoe managed to save a barrage of shots but was helped twice by Amy Edwards bravely saving shots on the line. Despite chances to relieve the pressure, the defence were continually turning the ball straight back over to Oxford.

The attacks and the short corners kept coming and Oxford once again took advantage of their dominance by converting another drag-flick to give themselves what would prove to be an unassailable lead despite Cambridge's best efforts.

Only at 2-0 down did Cambridge begin to carve themselves a foothold in the game. They started marking Oxford's key players better, and Hatty Darling's disguised passes were starting to successfully reach the forward line.

When Rhiannon Osbourne came on, she made some powerful forward leads and created the best chance thus far

five minutes before half-time, sending the ball through to Bella Padt, who fired wide.

In a reversal of their performance in the first half, Cambridge came out with blistering pace at the start of the second. Cambridge's forward line harassed Oxford's defence more effectively and gave them less time on the ball to pick out an incisive pass.

Eventually, this extra pressure told and Padt managed to win the ball from a full-back on the halfway line only for her attack to be thwarted by a good tackle from a rapidly retreating halfback. Nevertheless, Oxford were still in the game and only an excellent tackle from Edwards prevented one of their forwards from having a free run in on goal.

Cambridge won their first short corner of the game 11 minutes into the second half as a result of their improved attacking outlook. The ball was deftly slipped left but well stopped by a player on the post.

The Light Blues were retaining possession for longer periods of time and won two further short corners after good link-up play between the half-backs and the forwards. The chances became more threatening and only a good save from the Oxford keeper kept out Burrows' reverse stick deflection.

Eventually the higher intensity of the Light Blues paid dividends when

▲▼ The two sides will face off again in the Varsity Match on March 4th
(DOMININKIS ZALYS)



Darling unleashed an incredible cross-field pass, which was picked up brilliantly by Burrows. She drove straight into the attacking circle and hit the ball straight past the keeper, much to the delighted of the assembled crowd.

This deserved goal set up a frenetic ending as Oxford were trying to rebuff this re-energised Cambridge attack as they pressed for an equaliser. The ball was whizzing to both ends of the pitch, but the only definite chance came from another Oxford short corner. Again, their drag-flicker took the shot but as testament to how Cambridge had adapted throughout the game, they managed to charge the ball down and keep the deficit to a single goal.

This is the last time that Cambridge will meet Oxford before their Varsity game. Although it did not start well, Cambridge grew into the game and were the better side by the end of the game.

Despite this narrow 2-1 loss, on the evidence of this performance Cambridge should take confidence that they can defeat the Dark Blues in March at Southgate Hockey Club and avenge last year's defeat.

CUHC Women's Blues: Freddie Briscoe, Hatty Darling, Molly Buxton, Amy Edwards, Lucia Corry, Hattie Bevan, Alicia Murphy, Clare Marsh, Bella Padt, Georgie Burrows, Annalise Whitehead.

Replacements: Rhianna Miller, Bethan Moncur, Rhiannon Osbourne, Lydia Copeland.