

It's not enough.

The systems for students reporting misconduct are inadequate. One speaks out about her experiences.
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VARSITY

In the face of financial hardship, two students went into sex work

▲ A photo illustration outside Senate House (JOE COOK)

Niamh Curran

"I struggled to balance the need to perform sex work, to afford necessities, the need to attend lectures and do academic work, and my need to rest and look after my diminishing physical health. I couldn't manage it", said Taylor*, a Cambridge student who took on sex work alongside their degree after facing severe difficulties covering financial

expenses.

Taylor told *Varsity* that they went into sex work while in Cambridge because they could not obtain the financial support needed to cover necessary expenses. Another student who spoke to *Varsity*, Sam*, said that they entered sex work because they felt it would offer financial independence they could not otherwise obtain.

Taylor said that they needed the additional financial support to afford to

live in private rent accommodation, along with unforeseen expenses, and costs relating to their disability. They were unable to live in college accommodation because they required mental health provisions that the college could not accommodate.

At one point, changes in their living situation meant they had to pay a sum upfront, which they could not afford.

The nature of their disability also meant they could not work long hours

alongside necessary work for their degree. They had previously left home due to a "hostile" relationship with their family. This, alongside their family's financial situation, meant they could not turn to them to help with rent payments.

The student reached out to two different members of University and College staff to seek financial support, but their experiences with these two individuals

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44% of Oxbridge entries from 143 schools

Edwin Balani, Sarah Orsborne, and Catherine Lally

Over 1,140 schools sent no students to Oxbridge between 2006 and 2017 despite their students having applied, a *Varsity* investigation reveals. This is compared to more than 6,000 students admitted from the top ten schools for Oxbridge admissions over the same time period.

Students from the top schools made in excess of 15,800 applications to the two universities. Of a total of 4,041 UK schools that had students apply, there were 2,974 schools that sent only ten or fewer students to Oxford or Cambridge in the same time period.

By contrast, there are 143 schools which have sent 100 or more students to

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College disciplinary lapse Its impact on one student's PTSD

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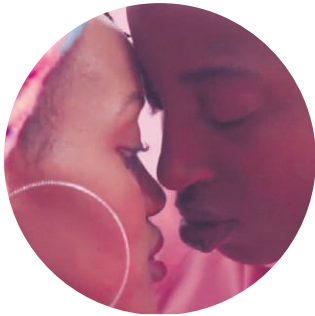
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Bina Agarwal: 'You'll never get anything until you fight for your rights'

*The award-winning Economics Professor speaks to **Merlyn Thomas** about her work on women's property rights and challenging the traditional model of the household*

"I read Marx's *Das Kapital* when I had flu once. I was wowed by it." Brilliant and humble, Professor Bina Agarwal's titles precede her person.

Born in the dusty heat of Rajasthan where her grandparents lived, before Bina and her family moved to Delhi, the cultural capital of India, she reminisces about her childhood fondly. "It was fantastic. My paternal grandparents moved to the foothills of the Himalayas and my other set of grandparents stayed in Rajasthan. So we spent our summers sometimes in unbearably hot climates and sometimes terribly cold ones."

An early-achiever from the offset, she went to sixth-form early when she was fifteen. Although she has excelled now in every respect in her field, as a teenager she had never even considered doing economics. Stuck between physics and English literature, her parents finally suggested she study economics, "Economics is a scientific subject but you can also tell a good story, so I thought why not?"

Perhaps what is most striking about Agarwal is that she is totally down to earth when it comes to the gravity of her accomplishments, casually telling me about her days as an undergraduate at Cambridge, studying Economics at Murray Edwards, at the time called New Hall. She adds: "I was quite young when I came. I was 17 and a half and I had never lived abroad so in many ways it was wonderful. It was a growing up period. It was really marvellous in that sense. But there were just ten women in a class of 150. And I was the only Indian woman. The only brown woman."

Dining options at Cambridge during Agarwal's undergraduate years were a far cry from today's meat-free Mondays. Agarwal was the only vegetarian in college in her time at Cambridge. "But College did something wonderful for me. I used to tell the chefs in advance when I was coming to buttery and they would prepare special hot dishes for me."

She chuckled, "So I made a lot of friends because I was very happy to share my food with others." She leans in to tell me indignantly, "The only vegetarian! Can you imagine?"

Embracing her time away from home, painting and reading poetry in her spare time, it is no wonder that her vision as an economist is more unconventional and imaginative than most.

After completing her degree, she returned to Delhi to do a PhD, where she began to specialise in her scope of subject. "The choice of subject was very much decided by the problems India was facing", while she says that "India was an agrarian society predominantly both in terms of proportional GDP and also the number of people located in farming." She adds: "plus, there was a lot of poverty."

In India, a country with gaping inequalities in wealth and a rapidly expanding economy leaving behind vast swathes of society, there is much progress to made with regards to gender equality. And it is here that Agarwal has focussed much of her efforts, but particularly in the gender gap in command over property.

Wedge between Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* and Khalil Gibran's poetry anthology, on the bookshelf in her office, lies *A Field of One's Own*, Agarwal's award-winning book. She is perhaps best-known for this work, whose title was inspired by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. When she wrote it in 1994, "no one was working on the question of women's property."

An economic staple and a contemporary feminist literature in its own right, her book demonstrate the limits of the commonly-held idea that women's empowerment simply means jobs in the urban workplace.

Instead she emphasises the importance not only of women being in the agrarian workforce, but for them to be truly empowered, they need to have their own fields to which they have full

“When you have land or a house, you have a credible exit option. If you have a place to go, you can leave”



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News



legal rights and titles.

Agarwal says: “The book came out at the right time. It hugely caught the attention of both civil society and current policymakers.”

“In 1995, I was asked to chair a village council election, in Madhya Pradesh. There were all these women who were really enthusiastic, and I shared some of my ideas about their rights to land and I saw the sparkle in their eyes. When you start talking about something like land, they say ‘well nobody’s every thought of us.’”

Agarwal is a rare economist in her field who has sought to explicitly examine gender asymmetries, not only to challenge the traditional model of a household and its intra-family relationships, but also to weave these into public policy.

India’s inheritance laws are complicated, to say the least. Different laws apply depending on religion and state. The traditional idea of the household sees a benevolent leader. Most economic models and laws treat the “household” as a single entity, one with an altruistic family head – and in government pro-

grammes predefined as male household heads – whose members share common preferences and interests, she outlines in her talk. But she contends that this abstract does not work in real life.

Using her field research, she ran her first campaign in 2005, where she successfully amended the Hindu Succession Act, essentially removing gender discrimination with regards to property rights.

Although most programme’s working with women in developing countries focus on getting women into employment, Agarwal says there can be a perverse effect to this: “in cases where the woman is employed but her husband is not, there were the highest reports of domestic violence”. In this sense, Agarwal goes against the grain, arguing that it is a woman’s command over the property she works on which ultimately affects her welfare to the largest extent. She explains how, “we looked at how command over property affected rates of domestic violence in Kerala, a state in the south of India.

“Looking at 500 randomly selected urban and rural households, we checked

whether they had land or house, both or neither. When women owned neither house nor land, 49% experienced domestic violence. Of those who had land, 17% experienced domestic violence. Of those who had a house, 10% experienced it. And of those who had both, 7% experienced domestic violence. The results speak for themselves.”

“When you have land or a house, you have a credible exit option. If you have a place to go, you can leave”, she explained.

But she has still faced a great deal of opposition: “Often [they] say, ‘women don’t need land of their own because their families have land and they’ve never asked for it anyway.’ Yet I found when you talk about it to women, it is very important to them. Just because they have not asked, does not mean it’s not important to them.”

A particular group of women stands out in Agarwal’s memory. During a workshop she ran in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, in 1997, she met with a group of women who had just returned from towns after leaving their jobs to cultivate plots of land, whilst their husbands

continued to work in the city to bring in additional income.

She recounts the story, and says “I asked them, ‘Who will this land go to?’” They then “told me, ‘Well it will go to the oldest son’, but I asked, ‘Shouldn’t you be getting it because you’re the ones working and toiling away for it?’”

They were silent initially, she tells me. So she asked again. “We do understand your question ... no one has ever asked us before.”

Agarwal paused for a moment to look at me, waiting for this to sink in. “Often, when you’re disadvantaged, you don’t ask for what you most need because you never imagine that you’ll get it.”

Agarwal’s heart for gender equality is not newfound, she explains “I first spoke about women’s rights when I was 15. It was in school. It was an exercise to hone our debating and presenting skills. Some people talked about how to lay the table. I talked about the importance of women voting and their rights. And I remember saying, ‘When we have the right to vote, let’s all decide we need to vote for women.’”

She laughed, reassuring me, “I wouldn’t do that today, but for me, it was important, because I saw in Rajasthan – a place that’s fairly conservative for young women – that even better off families don’t send their girl children to school beyond a few years.” She adds, “of course, things have changed a little now.”

She talks fondly of her childhood. “My parents were very keen on all of us – three daughters and one son – and we were all very well educated. But when I went back to my grandmother’s village, I could see that lots of the households had very conservative attitudes towards girls, and so made me very conscious that it was very unjust. Children tend to think things are fair or not – it hits you very quickly.”

It comes down to the idea of owning something, Agarwal insists. During her talk, she speaks fondly of her *dadiji*, her grandmother, who – like most Indians – kept her most treasured belongings under her bed and on top of wardrobes. “She had a big, old metal trunk that she’d keep under her bed and would never let any of us go near. Each time she went away she’d tell us, ‘Nobody should touch my trunk.’ We’d reassure her, saying ‘No no, *dadiji*. Don’t worry.’”

“When she passed away and we sorted through her belongings, we finally opened the trunk and found there was very little at all in it. But it was her bargaining chip. It was a way of say “You’re not going to get whatever’s inside here if you’re not nice to me.”

For Agarwal, she has been an ‘only’ type of woman for most of her life. The only vegetarian in her college, the only Indian woman studying Economics in her year, the only person to have started work on gender equality in property. This ‘only-ness’ is one of the things that makes her most warm and gracious. A pioneer of sorts, and lone person at times in her field, she is adamant but fervent in her imagination.

She summarises her talk with the same revolutionary vision with which she begins it, using a rallying cry from the Bodhgaya movement in Bihar, where women struggled to have land put in their own names: “We had tongues but could not speak, we had feet but could not walk, now that we have the land, we have the strength to speak and walk.” She later tells me, “you’ll never get anything until you fight for your rights”.

▲ Agarwal says her choice of field was influenced by the problems India faced at the time (MERLYN THOMAS)

“Often, when you’re disadvantaged, you don’t ask for what you most need because you never imagine that you’ll get it”

News

Colleges lack sufficient information and understanding of step-free and wheelchair access, says CUSU report

Stephanie Stacey
Senior News Editor
Kiran Khanom
Senior News Correspondent

Many of the University's Colleges hold insufficient information about wheelchair and step-free access, and several do not appear to fully understand the requirements of disabled students, according to a recent report produced by the CUSU Disabled Students' Campaign.

The report was released on Wednesday, on the inaugural Day of Action for Disability Equality in Education, which was marked both in Cambridge and nationwide.

Entitled 'To boldly go where everyone else has gone before: Step-free and wheelchair access in the University of Cambridge', the report used testimonies to illustrate issues still faced by disabled students and staff, and raised concerns about the extent of colleges' compliance with the 2010 Equality Act.

It highlighted insufficient clarity of provision for those with disabilities, and pointed to "a lack of understanding on the part of some Colleges" as to what constitutes 'wheelchair access' or 'step-

free access'.

In the report's introduction, CUSU Disabled Students' Officer Emrys Travis writes, "Even physical environments populated by newer builds than those in Cambridge fail with shocking frequency to provide access for wheelchair users, and for other disabled people who need step-free access."

Cambridge, "with its greater than average number of old (and often listed) buildings (never mind the cobblestones)", can therefore cause particular issues for disabled students and staff.

According to the report, only three of the University's 31 colleges were able to provide an up-to-date 'access audit' – a document detailing an assessment of a college's sites compared against best-practice standards. Of these documents, one dated to 2017, one to 2011, and the other to 2004. Many colleges were unable to respond to the Freedom of Information requests submitted by the Disabled Students' Campaign, and, even when full audits were provided, these were "often lacking in detail". *Varsity* has reached out to the University for comment.

Due to the lack of available data, the report concludes that it is "essentially impossible" to make "any significant

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We urgently need to see tougher rules for employers
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assessment" of the extent to which the majority of the University's colleges are compliant with the 2010 Equality Act, which requires that anticipatory reasonable adjustments be made for disabled people.

Travis said it is "shocking" that many people "seem to think the conversation has 'moved on'" and often assume that wheelchair users, as the group often reflexively thought of when disability and accessibility are mentioned, are sufficiently catered for already, declaring that this "is absolutely not the case".

One of the report's main recommendations is that colleges buy into an incoming initiative spearheaded by Cambridge's Disability Resource Centre, which will see the University make use of AccessAble, an accessibility audit software. AccessAble aims to create an 'access map' of all central university sites and faculties in Cambridge with the aim of aiding disabled students and staff. However, this map would not automatically include the University's 31 colleges.

The report was released on the inaugural Day of Action for Disability Equality in Education, which saw a series of events hosted by CUSU and the Cambridge Uni-

versities and College Union (CUCU), as well as a vigil organised by the newly formed Disabled People Against Cuts Cambridgeshire & Essex branch.

Events included a 'Know Your Rights' drop-in, introducing staff and students to the 2010 Equality Act, as well as an 'Art for Mental Health' event in collaboration with the 'Welfare is Political' series.

The Day of Action, which precedes Disability History Month (22nd November – 22nd December), was initiated by the national UCU Disabled Members' Standing Committee in order to organise against discrimination and focus attention on challenges faced by disabled students and staff. This Day of Action was the first event of its kind, and was marked nationally by campaigners, some of whom met in parliament to call for action on key issues affecting education, such as the need for statutory rights to disability leave and further measures to ensure buildings are fully accessible.

UCU national head of equalities, Helen Carr, said: "We urgently need to see tougher rules for employers, and a real commitment from government to tackle these issues so we can make our education institutions more accessible for disabled people."



▲ On Wednesday, the inau

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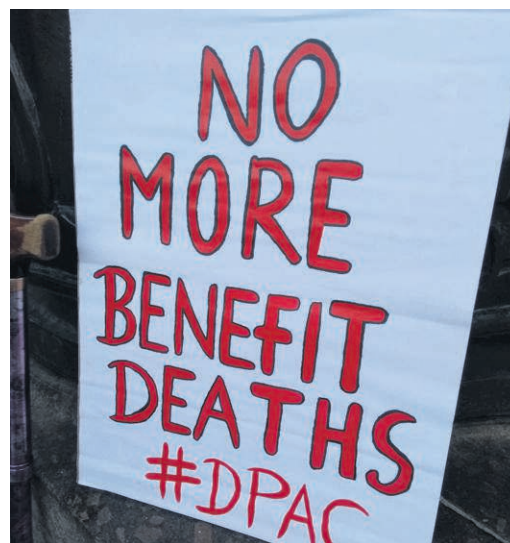
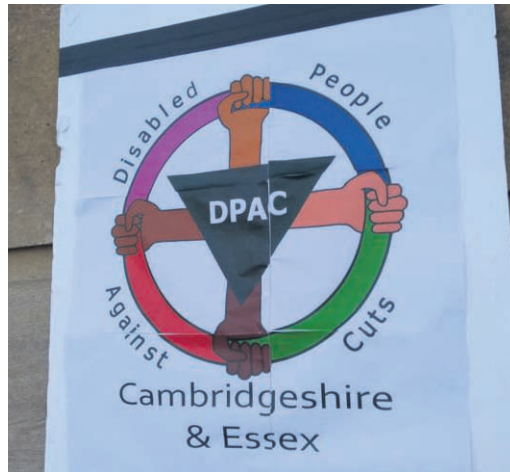
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Inaugural Day of Action for Disability Equality in Education took place, with a series of events organised in Cambridge (EMRYS TRAVIS)



THE KING'S MUSIC King's launches Apple Music playlists

King's College has become a curator on Apple Music, a digital music and video streaming service. The College will publish playlists on the history of the College and specific selections to accompany major festivals throughout the year. The playlists will be curated by current King's students and prestigious alumni. Current playlists include selections from the College Choir's new album, an Introduction to Choral curated by prominent British composer and King's alumni Bob Chilcott, as well as a 'tourguide' playlist about the College.

SUFFRAGETTES LIVE ON Newnham marks suffrage centenary

Newnham College held two workshop series for students in Cambridgeshire and Petersborough to commemorate the centenary of partial women's suffrage and raise awareness on the interdisciplinary nature of humanities and social science research. Students explored issues of suffrage through a myriad of humanities and social sciences subjects, with a chance to undertake their own research project. Outstanding projects would receive prizes.

OVERTURE TO HOME Tchaikovsky's cloak returned to Russia

Russian composer Tchaikovsky's mantle, which has been held by the University for 125 years, has now been returned to the Tchaikovsky House Museum in Klin, in Russia. Tchaikovsky was given the mantle for an honorary doctoral title when he was invited for a special reception during the 50th anniversary celebration of the Musical Society of the University. The mantle was mentioned in Tchaikovsky's diary alongside a detailed description of the ceremony. The return of the mantle was scheduled in the programme of the 'Tchaikovsky World Tour'.

VOICES FOR THE MIND Clare choir sings for Student Minds

Clare College choir was seen singing under the Raised Faculty Building at the Sidgwick Site on Tuesday afternoon. Around 20 members of the choir sang, as part of fundraising efforts for Student Minds Cambridge, a student charity which aims to engage with students and University staff about mental health in the University. The choir added to the Christmas vibes currently growing in Cambridge, following the Christmas light switch-on last week.

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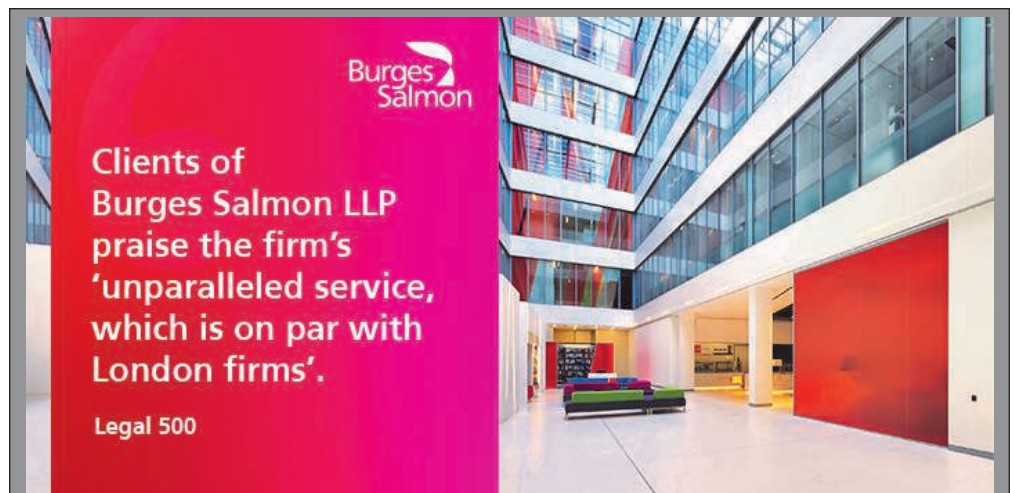
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News

‘It makes poor students feel like burdens’ Delays in college hardship funds cause students distress

Rosie Bradbury, Isobel Griffiths, and Jess Ma

“I do understand that people can make mistakes in their job, but I do think it is a bit unacceptable to have mistakes be so easily made when it affects the student so much.”

Several students have spoken to *Varsity* about their experiences with delays and logistical complications in receiving financial support, and have criticised the suggestion by some college development offices that students write thank you notes thanking donors.

Eimear Ní Chathail, an Irish student at Magdalene College, told *Varsity* about the logistical difficulties she faced when trying to receive her bursary. She receives a scholarship from the Irish government, but on the condition that the college sends a letter of confirmation that she is coming back to study each year and has passed her exams.

“They never, ever send it back until I literally show up at their door.” She explained that this year, when she rang the college to remind them to confirm that she would be returning, they had lost the letter from the Irish government, and it was up to her to get another one. This meant that she did not receive her bursary until early November, as opposed to the beginning of October.

She also faced a delay in the bursary she receives from the college. While they did delay the deadline for her college bill, “the combination, this year, of them [not sending the letter of confirmation to the Irish government], and the fact that the bursary they were giving me was delayed, meant that I had no money until last Friday.”

“They sent me a letter saying my bursary was coming, they emailed me saying I had to provide them with information to get my bursary, which I provided, and then they never told me my bursary wasn’t coming.

“They did not seem particularly organised in that respect.”

Steven Morris, the bursar at Magdalene, explained that the college had been facing technical issues with their SLC system, which caused some students to not receive their bursaries on time.

“All students have been given an apology and will be given temporary financial support by the College to avoid further delay and until the issues are resolved with the SLC,” he explained

A Downing student similarly stressed that the urgency of these situations can often be ignored by colleges. When her laptop broke, she went to the college for financial help, as she was already on the maximum student loan and Cambridge bursary. She did not receive the money until two terms later.

She explained that the onus was put on her to chase the college up for the money. “Eventually I went to [a member of senior college staff] because I hoped to find some sort of sympathy and awareness that I was only asking her for help because I really needed her to use her position to move things along, but instead she was quite cold and didn’t make an apology”, she explained.

“I had to beg the [college] to make



▲ Eimear Ní Chathail is a fourth-year at Magdalene (ROSIE BRADBURY)

“
I was
running out
of money
for food,
and they
made it
seem like I
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very in-
convenient
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an exception for me and put the £100 in my bank account because I was running out of money for food, and [they] made it seem like I was being very inconvenient.”

Another Downing student, Eleanor Hayes, explained that her college had tried to make it a “condition” of receiving any hardship funds that the students in receipt must write a letter of thanks to the donors.

Ever since Hayes’ mother, her sole carer, lost her job in between her first and second year, she has been reliant on the college’s hardship fund, as well as the government loan and the Cambridge bursary.

Writing to the students, the college encouraged these thank you letters because it was “very motivating for donors to understand the difference that their gift has made to individuals and by providing this information you may be indirectly helping future students.”

Hayes pointed out that the language changed over the course of her study, with the language of it being a “condition” only appearing in her second year. She challenged this in an email sent to those who had sent her the original request, and her tutor and senior tutor.

“I explained that it would be very stressful for me to write a thank you letter, like, thank you for letting me survive.”

CUSU Education Officer Matt Kite said, “[there] needs to be an open conversation about [the practice of asking for thank you notes] and the impact it has, joining up the people who are asking for these letters to be written and those who know about student experience”.

Rhiannon Melliar-Smith, a finalist at Trinity Hall, argued that writing notes

of thanks should be reserved for specific grants, and not asked of students for the Cambridge bursary. She added that she understood the University and college may each sponsor half for the bursary, but that would mean “some students have to thank various grants for the Cambridge bursaries and others don’t, depending [on] where the college finds the money from”.

According to Kite, the chair of Cambridge’s Senior Tutor’s Committee wrote to college development directors that students should not be asked to write thank you letters for the Cambridge bursary.

Melliar-Smith commented that being asked to thank donors for bursaries is “a bit patronising” since bursaries provide “the bare minimum for the quality of life you should have as a student” and is not something one actively applies for.

“[It] makes poor students feel like burdens”, she concluded.

On her experience with getting hardship funding, Melliar-Smith received a £500 loan to be repaid in four weeks when she applied for an emergency bursary when she was in “lots of debt” from lending. She was told that the money she got was to “tide me over”, but that repaying her debt was not a short term matter. Melliar-Smith pointed out that she got £350 when she got a first at the end of the year. “They clearly have money, but it’s just in different funds”, she said.

A spokesperson for Trinity Hall told *Varsity* that the college “has a reasonable provision of funding available to assist students experiencing financial hardship”, adding that “nearly all College funds are administered through the Benn Bursary Committee, which meets termly to address cases of unforeseen,

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accrued hardship”, declining to comment on individual cases.

As Downing’s access officer, Hayes pointed out that she helps students in financial difficulty without writing thank you notes, saying: “I don’t need to feel the pressure of indirectly helping future students through my own emotional labour.”

“Coming from the background I come from I want to help, but I want that choice to be mine, I don’t want to feel like it’s my fault if disadvantaged students don’t get here because they don’t have the money to get here – that’s your job, you get paid to do that job.”

Dr Guy Williams, the Senior Tutor at Downing, told *Varsity* that it was indeed not the University’s policy for students to be required to write a letter of thanks to the donors. He added that no students were sanctioned for not writing a letter of thanks.

Meg Gibson, also an access officer at Downing, explained that the administration of receiving hardship grants was also an issue for many students. Every time students need to receive money, they are required to fill out a physical form.

“You shouldn’t have to keep filling out the form, college knows your circumstances”, she said, “especially when it can be difficult reaching out in the first place.”

She added that students can often be left waiting for money during the administrative process. “Some people have had difficulties where they’ve submitted a hardship form to a tutor and the tutor hasn’t submitted it on time, which delays them getting their money ... it shouldn’t be dependent on things like that.”

In August, *Varsity* revealed that Cambridge’s Senior Tutor’s Committee is considering to cover all tuition and living expenses for the University’s poorest students in the form of “debt-free” studentships.

Alongside major proposals for increased financial support, a University Bursary task force also examined expanding the Barnard Scheme – a “supplementary” support scheme being developed at Trinity – to be rolled out across all undergraduate colleges.

Hayes explained the issue as one of a gap between college institutional structures and the individuals who work there. She explained that her tutor, for example, has always been supportive, and the bursar was willing to split her college bill so that she could make the payments more easily.

“There’s a massive disparity in college between individuals and their opinions, and the actual system of doing it”, she said.

However, she added that some of those working at the college were not supportive of her financial situation: “In conversations I’ve had where I’ve suggested I wouldn’t be able to study unless I have this money, I was told that that’s the way life works.

“It does make people feel unwelcome, that you have to beg for money and then show how grateful you are for it.”

Do you have a story to tell about your experience with college bursaries and hardship funding? Get in touch: news@varsity.co.uk

Students and staff raise flags over immigration policies

Millie Kiel and Isobel Griffiths
Deputy News Editors

Although they noted that they “haven’t been victimised in any way as of yet”, one international graduate student said that the government’s ‘hostile environment’ immigration policy is “like a spider’s web in which you’re already stuck” or “a ticking bomb”.

The Cambridge branch of the University and College Union (UCU) has recently begun campaigning on the issue of the government’s ‘hostile environment’ policy towards immigrants.

At the beginning of November, Cambridge UCU held a meeting with representatives from Unis Resist Border Controls (URBC) and International and Broke, two groups campaigning against punitive immigration measures, with the aim of offering staff and students the opportunity to discuss ways in which to push back against the government’s policies.

The Cambridge UCU graduate representative, currently on a Tier 4 student visa, told *Varsity* that students on this type of visa are left “on their own” in the collegiate system if unable to produce the money required for the visa in full, amounting to around £1,000, because Tier 4 visas are not covered by the loan system at Cambridge, nor at any other university in the UK.

They described the ‘hostile environment’ policy as “horrible policy that has ruined the lives of a lot of people”, adding: “there’s something horribly wrong with the immigration system in this country”.

Another student, Ahsan Memon, an Engineering postgrad, said that during a long and confusing application process, he felt that he was being “passed around admissions offices”.

Memon also told *Varsity* about his difficulties procuring a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS), something required by UK immigration laws to prove that a university will sponsor the application for a student visa.

Having arrived at the University, Memon formally complained about the way he had been handled by various admissions offices, but eventually withdrew this complaint, explaining that he “didn’t come to Cambridge to fight with the admissions office”.

Following campaigns by international staff and students, some progress has been seen in recent years, including reimbursement measures to cover visa costs and policies aiming to prevent deportations. A UCU campaign also brought about a change in government policy to allow migrant workers to exercise their right to take industrial action without affecting their ability to remain in the UK.

Speaking to *Varsity* about Cambridge specifically, however, Cambridge UCU branch secretary Waseem Yaqoob, said that “the response of this University has been characteristically weak”.

“The University markets itself as a global institution and a world leader in research

There’s something horribly wrong with the immigration system in this country

He claimed that the measures already rolled out by the University’s administration showed “little democratic oversight.”

“The University markets itself as a global institution and a world leader in research. It has a duty not to leave it to staff and students to face the burden of the ‘hostile environment’ alone”, added Yaqoob.

A University spokesperson said that “the University’s International Student Office provides dedicated support to all international students applying for a student visas to study at the University”. The Cambridge UCU graduate representative emphasised the University’s role in changing government policy: “Oxbridge has the power to lobby against a lot of these hostile environment policies.... The



▲ Students & staff protest the ‘hostile environment’ (URBC)

onus is on them.”

Speaking about the ‘hostile environment’ in general, they added, “This is a government policy that has discretion as its hallmark”, explaining that “no case looks the same but they’re all caused by one and the same thing: institutionalised racism and institutionalised apathy.”

As for future efforts to improve conditions for international students and staff, a workshop has been held by URBC, and the UCU intends to embark on a ‘Map Your University’ scheme. This will enable immigrants to trace the ways in which they have been institutionally victimised.

The UCU also plans to conduct a survey of international students, saying simply: “For now we’re gathering information.”

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What impact will you make?

News

Analysis In the first year with a simple opt-out, class lists offer a distorted view of attainment

Stephanie Stacey
Senior News Editor
Elizabeth Haigh
Senior News Correspondent

The University of Cambridge has published the class lists, the annual record of Tripos results, in the first year following the introduction of the simple opt-out procedure. Released on Wednesday 21st November, significantly later than in previous years, this year's class lists offer a potentially distorted view of overall attainment, due to the fact that more than a third of students chose to opt out of having their names and grades listed.

In the past three years, the class lists have been released on 12th October, 15th September and 7th September respectively. In mid-October, the Cambridge University Reporter team, responsible for the publication of the class lists, told *Varsity* that they expected the class lists to be published "a little later than usual but for no reason other than [the Reporter team's] availability to complete the work on it."

Asked about the future of the publica-

tion of class lists, particularly in light of new data protection regulation and the simple opt-out procedure, the Reporter team said: "Class lists will continue to be published in the Reporter until such time as the Regent House approves a contrary change to the relevant regulations."

In June, a *Varsity* Freedom of Information request revealed that 36.5% of eligible students chose to opt out of having their marks displayed both online and on notice boards outside of Senate House, representing 4,570 undergraduates and 103 postgraduates out of a total of 12,803 eligible students.

Opt-out rates were particularly high among first-year female students and arts students. This is clearly demonstrated when comparing, as one example, English and Maths Tripos results. Student numbers listed for the English Tripos have more than halved since the easy opt-out was introduced last year, with 193 Part II students listed for the 2016-17 academic year compared to just 88 for 2017-18. Contrastingly, the published Maths Tripos results saw a far smaller drop: 217 Part II students had their results published in 2017 compared



to 182 in 2018, a trend that was similarly reflected among first and second year students. In the cases of both Maths and English, the percentage of those listed who attained a First was higher this year than the year before, while the percentage of those listed to have attained a 2:iii or Third decreased.

The introduction of the simple opt-out option for Class Lists cast doubt on whether the Tompkins Table, the annual

▲ **The introduction of the simple opt-out system saw 36.5% of eligible students opt out from class lists**

(LOUIS ASHWORTH)

ranking of colleges based on exam results, would be able to continue.

Peter Tompkins, who has created the Table annually since 1981, said that although this year he was unable to see results and calculate the Table himself, he was able to ask a college tutor "who has access" to the results of all students – including those who opted out – to make the calculations using his formula. Every tutorial office was provided with two versions of the class lists: the first excluded students who had opted out, the version published this week, while the second was a confidential version containing the results of all students.

In April 2016, *Varsity* revealed that a review by the General Board of Faculties had recommended that class lists be abolished, a view which the University Council echoed. However, attempts to abolish the class lists were halted in November 2016 after a referendum launched by campaign group 'Save the Class Lists' found 55.2% of students in favour of an easier opt-out rather than total abolition, and after Regent House blocked a Grace that had proposed the lists' elimination.

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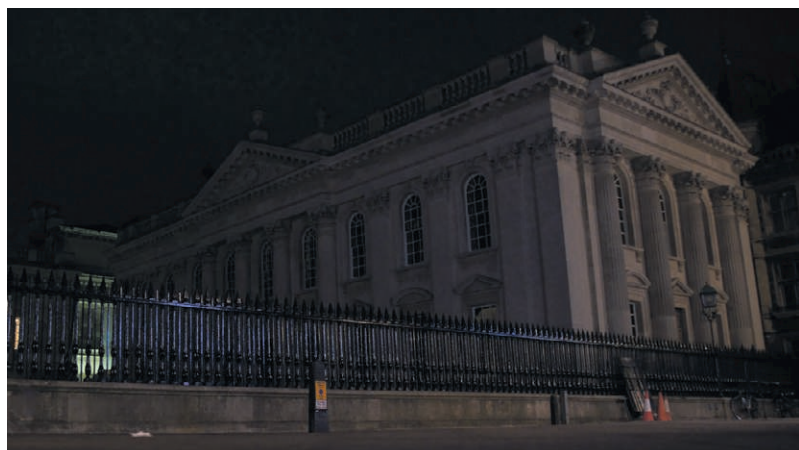
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The dangers two students faced in sex work



◀ Both students who spoke to Varsity entered sex work to achieve greater financial stability (JOE COOK)

► Continued from front page

Content note: This article contains mention of sexual assault

put them off approaching anyone else in the University for advice or assistance.

They were offered some financial assistance, however it was insufficient to cover their expenses.

A spokesperson for the University said, “We take student welfare very seriously, and we encourage any student who is struggling financially or with mental health difficulties to seek help from their College or the University.”

Believing themselves unable to find financial support elsewhere, Taylor entered sex work: “I felt that sex work was the only reliable choice.” By the end of the process, they said they had started to feel ashamed for being poor – a shame they did not feel when it came to sex work.

Taylor has now intermitted. Currently, they rely entirely on sex work as a source of income, their funding having stopped once they intermitted, as is standard practice of Student Finance England, which does not consider intermitting students to be full-time, and so withdraws any student loans and maintenance payments. Earlier this year, a Varsity investigation spoke to students left financially abandoned when they intermitted due to government policy inconsistencies in providing state support.

Shortly before intermitting, they said that the pressure of balancing their degree, covering their finances, and looking after their worsening mental health caused them to be “in constant distress”, and that they “ended up attempting suicide not long before [they] had to intermit”.

“Sex work granted me financial security and independence in a way [I was otherwise unable to], and has allowed me to survive whilst intermitting when I have no student loan, no access to benefits and cannot work more than a handful of hours a week,” Taylor said.

Their sex work has placed them in situations of intense risk. They told Varsity they have been assaulted “several times”. “I think some men do not

understand that even sex workers have boundaries and consent still matters. I have been strangled without warning, held in a location only to be sexually assaulted without payment, pressured into drinking [and] drug use”.

For Sam*, their decision to go into sex work was made in order to gain financial independence and stability.

They said, “Coming to Cambridge and seeing how financially unstable I was compared to everyone else, as well as how many people constantly relied on their parents, sex work seemed a natural way to gain financial stability in an independent and comfortable way, since it was a bonus and not necessary for me to survive.”

Sam works mainly in sugaring – having a sugar daddy – because they said this is the thing they’re most comfortable with.

Sam’s disability meant that they had few ways available to them of earning money.

They, too, have found themselves in very dangerous situations. “I find that many clients interpret ‘no’ as ‘yes’, and only stop when threatened explicitly with police intervention,” they said.

The nature of sex work often makes workers vulnerable to harm. A 2016 NUS survey of students who identified themselves as having been involved in sex work found that 47% of those surveyed had experience sexual assault while working, and 30% reported a physical assault.

Due to the taboo nature of the work, 82% of those survey respondents said they had not reported incidents that occurred while they were working to the police.

This leaves sex workers as a group who are simultaneously in need of protection, and difficult to protect.

For Taylor, turning to sex work was something they felt to be a financial necessity, yet in doing so, they now feel unable to seek support from the University, their college, staff or fellow students due to the stigma surrounding their work.

Both Taylor and Sam fear being kicked out of the University if they come forward with their work. Taylor said, “I’ve never spoken to staff members about it because the stigma has felt so intense

I’ve been afraid of being thrown out.” Their fear is, in part, due to the fact that the University has no explicit policy on students engaging in sex work.

Taylor remains unsure about whether they will be able to return to the University to finish their degree.

“I sustained a lot of trauma from the chronic stress I went through dealing with all these issues and I don’t think I could face it again, knowing that nothing has changed, that there still isn’t any real support,” they said.

If you have been affected by issues mentioned in this article, you can contact the Samaritans in the UK on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org, and the mental health charity Mind by calling 0300 123 3393 or

“I’ve found that many clients interpret ‘no’ as ‘yes’”

visit mind.org.uk.

The following organisations also provide support and resources:

Breaking the Silence: the University’s campaign against harassment and sexual misconduct (includes reporting mechanisms).

Cambridge for Consent: a student-run campaign to promote consent.

Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre: a charity for female victims of sexual violence.

Cambridge Nightline: a confidential night-time listening service.

Students’ Unions’ Advice Service: the University’s confidential, independent and impartial advice service.

*The names of the students who spoke to Varsity have been changed.

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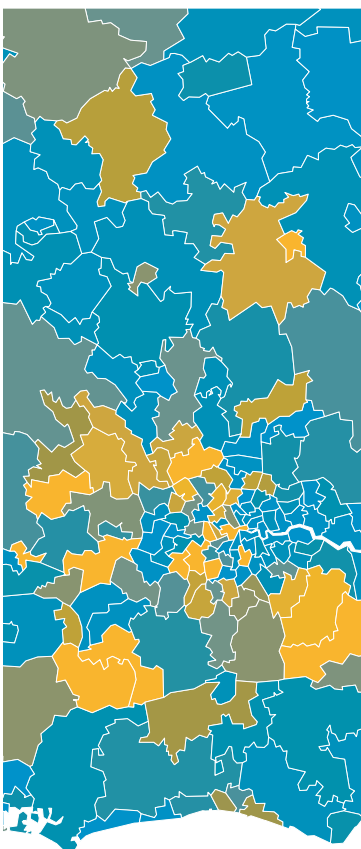
“Coming to Cambridge, sex work seemed a natural way to gain financial stability”

News

Access denied Nearly half of Oxbridge entries from top 3.5% of schools

● Of a total of 4,041 schools that had students apply over the 11 year period, there were 2,974 schools that sent only ten or fewer students to Oxford or Cambridge

● More than 6,000 students were admitted from the top ten schools for Oxbridge admissions over the same time period



Capital constituencies conquer: % Oxbridge intake by constituency. London saw the highest intake.

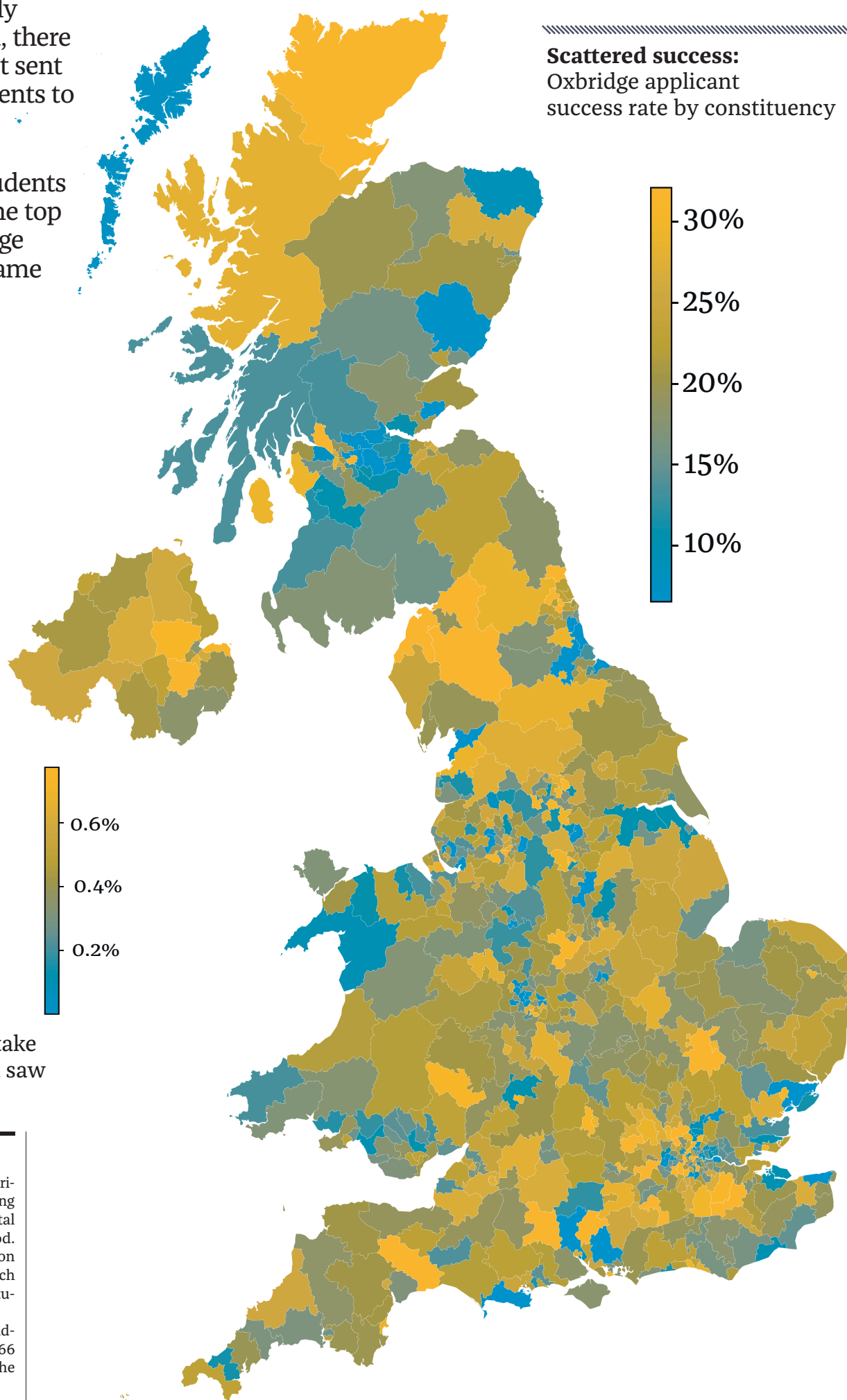
Continued from front page

to Oxbridge in the same eleven-year period, representing just over 3% of applying schools but making up 44% of the total Oxbridge cohort over the time period. The top two applying schools were Eton College and Westminster School, which have respectively seen 910 and 951 students attend the two universities.

The top ten schools for Oxbridge admissions in the state sector had 3,566 students accepted by Oxbridge over the 11 year period.

CUSU Access and Funding Officer Shadab Ahmed, told *Varsity*: "One of

Scattered success: Oxbridge applicant success rate by constituency



the largest problems with outreach is the difficulty in reaching certain populations within the UK, often a result of lack of teacher engagement ... Supporting a handful of students in the application process to selective universities is not seen to be cost-effective in schools under real funding constraints.

"Universities should continue to lobby the government to provide adequate funding to primary and secondary schools to allow them to support students, as well as ensuring that policy mitigates fundamental differences between children on the basis of socioeconomic demographics."

Admission statistics for the 2016 cycle, released earlier this year, placed Oxford and Cambridge in the bottom five in the UK with respect to the proportion of students admitted from areas of low participation. However, the two universities have seen some improvement in their access figures, with Cambridge admitting 4.5% of students from areas of the lowest participation in 2017, compared to around 3.2% in 2016.

Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education, Graham Virgo, told *Varsity* last month that, "we work incredibly hard to ensure the very best students are being admitted to Cambridge." He added, "we work very hard in the access and widening participation area and we have made very significant improvements in terms of what we are doing and the success by which we are doing it."

"I can see over the last [five to six] years in particular very significant improvements. There is more that can be done and we are well aware of that."

Cambridge recently announced a £500m fundraising campaign for student support, part of which will go towards a foundational year and a bridging course, to be rolled out in 2021. The hope is that the two programmes will help both improve the success rates of students applying from disadvantaged areas as well as boosting the numbers applying.

Similar schemes are already running in some Oxford colleges, namely Lady Margaret Hall and University College. Senior staff from both colleges told *Varsity* last month that they have since seen an increase in the number of applications from students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Last week, *The Oxford Student* revealed that two Oxford colleges, Wadham and Brasenose, offer some scholarships exclusively to privately educated students. And earlier this month, award-winning grime artist, Stormzy claimed that the University of Oxford rejected his offer to fund black students at the University to widen access and diversity, which the University has denied.

"I'm never going to criticise anybody for putting the spotlight on us and saying you should do more," Virgo said.

"What I will say is, seeing it from inside and knowing how colleges and the University take this so seriously, there are times when I get very concerned about some of the coverage that does not reflect on what hundreds of people are doing, including students, academics and [other] members of staff regarding access and widening participation."

‘Considered half the problem’ One student details how college disciplinary procedures exacerbated her PTSD



Rosie Bradbury
Senior News Editor

Content note: This article contains mention of sexual misconduct, abuse, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

“It sometimes felt like I was considered half the problem, rather than a victim”.

Over the past year, as CUSU Women’s Campaign has led efforts to reform the University procedures for cases of student misconduct, college disciplinary procedures have come under scrutiny.

Cambridge PhD student Sophia Cooke has detailed in *Varsity* today her experiences navigating college procedures, after reporting her ex-partner to Christ’s College in early 2017 for emotional and physical abuse.

Over two months, Cooke said that multiple discussions on, and several consecutive changes to, her ex-partner’s ban from the College caused her “further emotional trauma”. She said that the process of appeals and discussions on disciplinary action caused her “flashbacks”, and “exacerbated PTSD symptoms”.

“Each time [meetings and discussions took place], I would suffer debilitating panic, rendering me incapable of doing anything until the uncertainty was resolved”, she said.

Cooke said that the College’s actions during the disciplinary procedure were “seemingly without understanding of the fragility of [her] mental health”, in asking that she present her testimony, and hear the testimony of her ex-partner, in a meeting of college tutors. Cooke ne-

gotiated instead that she provide a written statement to be read out.

The college’s procedure occurred prior to the case going to trial, where Cooke’s ex-partner was convicted of criminal damage and cleared of assault.

Cooke also described certain college staff voicing their opinions on her case in communications with other students – one of whom “[making] it clear they did not believe me”.

Christ’s College did not respond to request for comment.

The formal and informal disciplinary procedures in cases of student misconduct have been the subject of campaigners’ efforts over the past year to reform the disciplinary procedure, to centralise policies, and to push for any college staff involved in cases to receive training in speaking to students who have been sexually assaulted or abused, to have “clear and survivor-focused reporting systems” on a collegiate level.

CUSU Women’s Officer Claire Sosienski-Smith spoke to *Varsity* about “systems [which] can [be] put in place to empower students to report”, adding that “college procedures so often let down students”.

At present, students who wish to report a case of misconduct of an intimate nature have four options: reporting anonymously to the University through an system introduced last year, reporting informally or formally to the University, or reporting to their college.

Among their calls for reform, campaigners are pushing for the introduction of the position of an investigator – a person designated with mediating communication between students who

▲ **CUSU Women’s Officer Claire Sosienski-Smith spoke at a Reclaim the Night rally in March** (EVELINA GUMILEVA)

have come forward with a complaint and other stakeholders – in order to minimise students having to repeat their testimonies to multiple members of staff during disciplinary procedures.

Sosienski-Smith described the investigator role as taking “steps toward the idea of us centering the survivor and the survivor’s welfare”. She added that at present, “there [are] too many gaps in finding meaningful justice for people”.

Sosienski-Smith said that in calls for reform, WomCam is hoping to address the question, “Why have we had so many anonymous reports, and so few formal reports?”

Sosienski-Smith said of Breaking the Silence, the University’s flagship campaign to prevent sexual misconduct in Cambridge: “we don’t want that to merely be a gesture”. Campaigners have called for the University’s formal disciplinary procedure – most publicly in a Senate House discussion held last term – to move from a criminal burden of proof to a civil burden of proof, which the majority of UK universities employ.

Speaking to *Varsity* in April, ex-CUSU Women’s Officer Lola Olufemi and one of the major forces behind changes in University policy on sexual violence, described Breaking the Silence as “admitting that we have a problem”.

“Are we willing to pressure colleges – every single college – to have someone that students can access, that works specifically on sexual violence and assault?”, Olufemi added.

Campaigners are also looking to address the differences in procedures of individual colleges – which each have individual procedures for dealing with

“There [are] too many gaps in finding meaningful justice for people”

sexual misconduct cases – by encouraging disciplinary procedures to be handled by the central University, once revised University procedures are introduced in 2019, following a consultation process on OSCCA proposals.

Speaking to *Varsity*, Fiona Drouet, a national campaigner on the issue of sexual violence on campus, argued that “in the situation of the accused having previous reports against them, [a centralised procedure] helps to build a pattern of behaviour.”

Last week, *Varsity* reported one student’s experience navigating her college’s disciplinary procedure after reporting another student of rape. She described her college’s failure to discipline the student who remains in her college, and to support her welfare during the process.

In September, *Varsity* spoke to two students who felt that complaints which they brought to their college were not taken seriously. Both cases – one of inappropriate remarks by a supervisor, and another of not being told of a lecturer’s past paedophilia conviction – faced bureaucratic pushback from the colleges.

“[The process] made me feel very exposed. I felt repeatedly judged and not understood. I was desperately trying to rebuild both my confidence and my trust in others”, said Cooke.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised here, the following organisations provide support and resources:

Breaking the Silence: the University’s campaign against harassment and sexual misconduct (includes reporting mechanisms).

Cambridge for Consent: a student-run campaign to promote consent.

Cambridge Rape Crisis Centre: a charity for female victims of sexual violence.

Cambridge Nightline: a confidential night-time listening service.

Students’ Unions’ Advice Service: the University’s confidential, independent and impartial advice service.

▼ **In May, students tied ribbons to Senate House in solidarity with survivors** (FELIX PECKHAM)



“I was desperately trying to rebuild both my confidence and my trust in others”

Features



Diabetes, my body and me

Fifteen years after her diagnosis, Cathy Fisher reflects on her relationship with her diabetes

The evening of my matriculation at Selwyn, I was anxious. My anxious mind wrestled with a question that was primal, that came at me like a bullet. There would be a post-ceremony dinner: what would we eat?

Having diabetes creates ample opportunity for food-related anxiety. On the evening of my matriculation, I worried whether I'd be able to eat what would feature on the menu. As is the nature of anxiety, from this single worry grew others. Would I administer insulin in the right dose and timing? In the absence of diabetic-friendly food, would I eat at all? Would I pretend to? Would people notice? What would they assume? Questions have an exhausting ability to reproduce.

It turns out I'd had nothing to worry about. The team at Selwyn had prepared all the accommodations I'd needed. What I'd so feared never manifested.

While I am one of the small percentage of people with type 1 diabetes, I tell this story as an example we might perhaps all relate to. In our body we are fundamentally alone, and in our mind we harbor preoccupation that can be invisible. On some days coping feels like a clumsy struggle, and on others, a graceful dance.

For me, the struggle is inextricable from meals. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition in which the body sabotages its ability to produce insulin, a life-sustaining hormone that is metabolically crucial, particularly when we eat. People with type 1 rely on synthetic insulin to do the work the pancreas is no longer able to. This requires all sorts of tedious calculation, thought and planning around what goes in the body. Eating can become frightening work.

How to reconcile this? Food is life-giving in the literal sense. It is also life-sustaining in a broader way. We gather around it in expressions of our humanity. We design physical spaces for it, with dining halls, restaurants and kitchen tables being fundamental structures in support communion of food, ideas and people. Meals bring us together in honor of a special event, perhaps a birthday. Through food we express hospitality, inviting people into the intimacy of our living space. Perhaps we return to our childhood homes, to tables that have been set and cleared for decades, that have silently held space for association. Food is infinite in its interpretational possibilities: it can be love, altruism, adven-

ture, control, rebellion, identity, values. Eating is a societally-dignified activity through which, whether consciously or not, we create meaning. This is tangible now, as the year's end approaches us with its season of holiday parties, pub quizzes and dinners.

I find myself reflecting on my diagnosis, which took place exactly fifteen years ago this week. I was a first-semester freshman at Duke University, and on a rainy weekday morning collapsed in the dining hall over a bowl of cereal. I awoke from a diabetic coma with a new diagnosis and a new life, one that had taken a scalpel to some of its innocent parts. A sandwich was no longer a sandwich.

Amidst the brightness of that holiday season, I had questions with a dark edge. What were the implications of incurability? What is the nature of an illness that's chronic? What did it mean to have a body that attacked what was vital? Would I ever be loved? Could I love myself? Did I even want to? Underlying them was a small voice: why me?

Fifteen years after that first November, I am again a student, now in the first term of a graduate program at Cambridge. My mind returns to where I started. I think about my freshman-year self and its questions, to which I can see there was never an answer. I suspect there can be none for the questions that most pain us.

But time is a potent softener, and there is solace in what goes unanswered. Where there is no explanation, there is a vacuum to fill with new thought and

“In some days coping feels like a clumsy struggle, on others, a graceful dance”

dimension, or perhaps with gentler, humbler inquiries about a lived life. The unanswered question contains multitudes, holding awe and tenderness, vulnerability and fear at once.

My questions have been rewritten, converging into a singular one: why not me?

I am stunned by these fifteen years, which have somehow returned me to a place of beginning anew.

I walk down Trinity Street and see the questions of my younger self reflected in students' faces as they bicycle to class or pour over books in the library. I don't pretend to know their stories or the burdens they carry, the questions that gnaw at them, or will. But I do know my story is not unique. We all carry loads that are invisible. I marvel at the people who pass, at the beauty of their place and time in the universe, one that is so brilliant it almost explodes. In our bodies we may be alone, but in the human experience we are rich in companionship.

This week, Americans celebrate Thanksgiving in gatherings of food, family, and gratitude. This being my diagnosis week, in my mind I return to the emergency room and the day when a sandwich stopped being a sandwich. My returning sense of loss can feel incompatible with a festive exercise in giving thanks. But I no longer seek to reconcile the asynchronous. I want the palpable life texture of the unanswered question. I want to hold the dualities, at once the bitter and the sweet. I am grateful that life can contain both.

▲Illustration by Zoe Matt-Williams for Varsity

“Eating can become frightening work”

Rethinking the canon with PhD student Sarah Jilani

Jonathan Chan talks to a PhD student from King's in his penultimate column on decolonising English

“Sometimes I'm grateful that I did not have my formative years in Oxbridge,” remarks Sarah Jilani (Ph.D., King's), “because I wonder if I would have had the confidence to work on the topics I'm working on today.” Sarah studied for an undergraduate degree in English at the University of York before going on to a Master's programme at Oxford. As a Ph.D. candidate, Sarah is one of a handful of doctoral students in the English Faculty whose academic areas of interest lie within the realm of postcolonial studies. The work of these students signifies a departure from the type of research ordinarily undertaken in the Faculty. Her arrival also coincided with the ascension of the Decolonise English campaign, in which she has continued to play a role in pushing the boundaries of discussion within the English Faculty.

Born to a Kashmiri-British father and Turkish mother in Istanbul, Sarah grew up in a bilingual household negotiating the tenuous relationship between being a foreigner and a local in Turkey. Bearing British and Turkish passports, Sarah found herself confronted by the challenge of proving she was a home student upon arriving in university. “In some ways, I never had recourse to the certainty of one answer when it came to self-defining notions based in race, nationality, and mother tongue,” Sarah notes. “So I had to choose between letting indeterminacy being a crippling or an empowering thing.”

Sarah's experience as a mixed race person with an international school education has equipped her with the ability to think critically about her heritage. With one foot in the cultures of the Global South and another in the metropolitan centers of the West, Sarah's intellectual interests have continued to dwell on the non-Eurocentric ways in which people's lives have been defined around the world. Her study of postcolonial literatures has not simply been shaped by a desire to read and study narratives about people who have had similar experiences as her. Rather, she argues that texts that deal with questions of discrimination, mixed identity, and representational justice are the very questions she wants to delve into. “I identify with these texts in an emotive and an intellectual sense,” she remarks, “because they are preoccupied with the things I have been preoccupied with all my life.”

Arriving at York proved to be a departure from the educational and cultural environment Sarah had become accustomed to. Having been exposed to the works of writers of colour like Chinua Achebe and Toni Morrison while taking the International Baccalaureate, and

“There are simply not enough resources available to facilitate these kinds of research”



works of Turkish literature through her mother, the relative ethnic and academic homogeneity of the UK university struck her as insular in focus, similar to the English Tripos. Tripos. Her Master's program in Oxford proved even more rigid and canonical in its focus on such writers as Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. Through her four years of university work, Sarah found herself drawn to postcolonial approaches to such canonical texts. For example, she examined tensions surrounding the constitution of British identity in Eighteenth-century poetry and on anxieties around blackness in film adaptations of *Othello*. These questions of identity, nationality, and race are often central to postcolonial approaches to literature in any era.

It was only during a module on literatures of resistance in her third year of undergraduate study that she was introduced to literature that was explicitly political. The theories of identity she'd previously worked on began to feed into the material dimension—the lived experiences of people and nations struggling to recover autonomy. She examined the literatures produced during periods of decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s in nations newly independent from the British Empire. This interest was sharpened in her master's dissertation at Oxford where she focused on the relationship between decolonisation and the self in post-independence literature and film. This fed in to later work as a freelance arts and film journalist contrib-

▲ Jilani grew up in a bicultural household that spoke Turkish and English (ROSIE BRADBURY)

uting articles to *The Economist*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and *The Independent*. The concerns she grappled with in university continued to shape her freelance career: she wrote articles foregrounding artists and filmmakers of colour; of artistic movements around the globe; and reviews of world cinema. A short stint in the Istanbul office of a global advertising firm cemented a desire to remain in the UK, where she felt the workplace had less sexism, homophobia, and racism. “Academia and journalism both warrant a jail sentence in Turkey at the moment,” she laughs, “but they're the only things I know how to do.”

Embedded in her research is the fundamental question, “How do we talk about postcoloniality and selfhood?” Sarah describes how the idea of the self has long been associated with the type of bourgeois individualism usually rooted in Western liberal discourses. The colonial process of grouping people led to a flattening of their humanity, in which the colonised were often seen as masses rather than individuals. At the same time, colonialism oppressed collective ways of self-identification, and instilled inferiority complexes. Because they attempt to rethink both self and society, Sarah argues, films and literatures after the independences treat subjectivity as a key concern.

More practically, Sarah notes that there remains a dearth of funding for Ph.D. students attempting to do research in postcolonial studies. Of the 60 or so

Ph.D. students the AHRC funds every year, Sarah is the only one in her 2017 cohort undertaking postcolonial studies in English. She addresses the fact that the AHRC funds topics it finds to be of interest and urgency, but wonders if postcolonial studies has not been given that same sense of critical weight. Given the small number of English Ph.D. students pursuing such topics, Sarah argues that it is inevitable that there would not be enough supervisors who feel equipped or interested in marking essays by undergraduates on gender, race, intersectionality, and practical criticism in non-Western contexts. “There are simply not enough research students in the current English Faculty working through these lenses,” Sarah argues. “It trickles down to the ways in which undergraduate students are taught.”

The situation Sarah finds herself in proves to be one in which she will continue to be culturally alienated in the UK's higher education system. She remarks that as more people grow up having the same experiences as her — one defined by a perspective that results from multiple belongings — these questions of representational justice will become even more pertinent in the academic sphere. “More and more of us belong to several places, cultures and histories,” she remarks, “and we are all coming of age.” It is in future academics like Sarah whom we can continue to place our faith in to transform Cambridge and drive the most important discussions of today.

Features

In the dawn of MeToo, a culture of disbelief persists

*Drawing on her own perspective of MeToo, columnist **Priya Edwards** writes that the conversation is still being unfairly driven by women speaking out*

Whilst watching Dr Christine Blasey Ford throughout Kavanaugh's confirmation process, I felt a constant conflictual desire between fighting for Dr Ford, for myself, for women recovering from trauma everywhere, and wanting to run away and hide from all of it.

The 'rationalistic discourse' surrounding the confirmation of Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court was intensely difficult. When having conversations about it, I felt horribly exposed to people's 'impartiality'. It was enraging to have to sit in a kitchen, or a pub, or a college JCR and 'debate' whether or not Kavanaugh was guilty, why Dr Ford has only now come forward, whether someone's sexual behaviour discredited their professional qualification. My anger came from this feeling that in order to justify myself, I too had to expose myself, to recount some form of injustice at the hands of men in order to explain to people, often men, just how trauma – particularly sexual assault – haunts a person.

Asking victims to publicly recount explicit details of their trauma in order to bring down the powerful men who have harmed them is a recurring theme in #MeToo. It exposes them not only to the non-believers, those who imply or outright state that 'she probably deserved it' but also to the personal and emotional burden of reliving their worst experiences on a public platform. I had no desire, as I have little desire now writing this article, to reveal details of my assault just so that other people can recognise and legitimise the emotional impact it has on victims, that explain why we may be unwilling to come forwards, why we would prefer to focus on our own personal recovery. I felt my own choices not to come forward and engage in disciplinary action were being implicitly put on trial.

Instinctually, asking women to take on this burden, from private conversations to a global stage, feels wrong. Un-



“My anger came from this feeling that I too had to expose myself”

fortunately, I cannot help but see such misogyny echoed in movements here in Cambridge. Breaking the Silence is again an incredible force for change within the university; however, the implication behind 'breaking the silence', again, is that for silence to be broken it encourages victims – regardless of gender – to come forward, showing how much more work we have to do in challenging our conceptions of sexual misconduct. The anonymous reporting system does enable victims who feel they are not able to come forward publicly to feel like they are contributing to a change, but that does not account for the significant amount of trauma that victims are required to relive by just recounting the incidents.

The WomCam campaign to lower the burden of proof in the university's disciplinary procedure does go some way to alleviating pressure upon victims to constantly have to prove themselves. But if conversation surrounding high-profile cases of victims speaking out continue to blame or question victims, the culture that keeps them silent will not be changed. We live in a society where, still, in spite of all of the work done by femi-

▲ Students tied purple ribbons to the gate of Senate House before a discussion earlier this year (FELIX PECKHAM)

“I object to a climate in which there is a burden on victims - and victims alone - to fight their oppressors”

nists, the underwear a teenager wears can be utilised against her in court. Victims who speak out on a public platform are stunningly brave. Nevertheless, I object to a climate in which there is a burden on victims – and victims alone – to fight their oppressors, particularly in a legal system where it is disproportionately hard to prove anything.

#MeToo and the subsequent beginnings of a revolution where women have said 'no more' to rampant cultures of harassment and assault that dominate workplaces across the world is no less than incredible. The empowerment of victims and potential victims to finally say no to sexual aggression is hugely important for me personally. For how many women can recall a time when they have put up with someone, often a man, making them uncomfortable for fear of confrontation?

Yet, seeing Dr Ford on the verge of tears, seeing men speak against lowering the burden of proof in the university's disciplinary procedure, I can't help but feel that #MeToo inevitably falls short. Like many anti-oppression movements over time, the burden of reliving trauma in order to alter the status quo remains

firmly on the victims. When we are fighting against sexual assault, what is required of victims is nothing less than a public exposure of what is, in many cases, the worst thing that's happened to them.

#MeToo can sometimes feel like a cautionary tale: here is a woman who has been broken, forced to tell the world about this brokenness, only for 'the world' to completely disregard the emotional resilience it took for Dr Ford to convey that brokenness. We must all work to make sure no more women suffer like her. As a movement, #MeToo is a powerful force for good, but it is not enough; it does very little to alleviate the victims suffering. The assaulted cannot become un-assaulted through confession and revelation, and we as a society must find ways to better accommodate the hurt of victims in institutional spaces.

That begins by encouraging allies to speak up, to say 'I believe you' to their friends, colleagues, strangers. It begins by those who can fight for what is right speaking up and leading where survivors cannot. Until we alter this culture of disbelief, institutional abuse will continue.

Rafiki: dismantling the myth of an ‘un-African’ queer love



Waithera Sebatindira reflects on screening Kenyan film, *Rafiki*

Rafiki is not the first queer love story to be told on the African continent, nor will it be the last. The film follows two young women living in Nairobi, daughters of rival politicians, who expose deep-seated political rifts and the dangers of widespread homophobia when they fall in love. It’s a moving love story drawn together by young but seasoned director Wanuri Kahiu and, refreshingly, it lacks the voyeurism so often found in movies about women in love, which are usually directed by men. But beyond that, *Rafiki* is significant for me because it adds a new dimension to my understanding of my queer self. Coming out in Cambridge was made easier for me by a community of queer black women, but the images of queer love I saw here were still overwhelmingly white, and inevitably British. This film ties me to a Kenyan community that I’ve yet to fully engage with, but one that I know is waiting for me when I return home.

The themes in *Rafiki* have been examined by other African storytellers.

From Monica Arac de Nyeko in Uganda, whose short story inspired *Rafiki*, to Nigeria’s Wole Soyinka and Tendai Huchu in Zimbabwe among many others. So why decide to organise a panel event about *Rafiki* in particular, and why in Cambridge?

Beyond my personal connection to the film’s setting, the political response to its release threw up a lot of pressing questions for me – questions I felt could be answered well if I had access to the University’s resources. Screening a film costs money, and I suspected that academics would justifiably be more interested in taking part in a panel that would be useful for their career as well as eye-opening for myself and whatever audience I could gather.

Upon its release, *Rafiki* was immediately banned by the Kenya Film Classification Board for “promoting lesbianism” and posing a threat to Kenyan values (the Supreme Court has since struck down the ban). It struck me that I’ve been hearing similar rhetoric while studying in England, where immigrants and their allies are regularly deemed threats to “British values”. I asked of my own country the same questions I ask while I’m here. What are these so-called values? Who lays them down? Are LGBT+ Kenyans incapable by virtue of their very existence of upholding Kenyan values? Are they Kenyan at all?

The question has been asked in various contexts before, but I wanted to look specifically at what it means for

“This film ties me to a Kenyan community that I’ve yet to fully engage with, but one that I know is waiting for me when I return home”

an African country to reject an entire group of people as part and parcel of its process of postcolonial nation-building. Most of the rhetoric in which African homophobia is rooted insists that homosexuality is somehow “un-African” – a Western import. The primary weapon I see used against this myth is the excavation of evidence that same-sex sexual behaviours and ritualised practises existed long before Europeans unleashed their tyranny (and their culture) on to our continent.

This is important work and I feel validated by it. I love the idea of existing as a hybrid; someone who is not totally the product of her culture’s pre-colonial past but who has also not assimilated fully into the culture of her former colonial masters. My identity as a queer woman is made richer when I combine the queer semiotics I’ve acquired by being in England with a history of non-normative sexualities within my Kikuyu tribe that have nothing to do with Western influence.

But more needs to be done (and is being done) because myths such as these are not propagated purely because of ignorance. Lies about minority groups persist because they uphold structures of power.

I wanted an event that would examine exactly what these structures are in country-specific contexts, what work is being done by grassroots activists to achieve sexual justice, and explore the ways in which LGBT+ politics can be

▲ Two queer women at the heart of *Rafiki* (RAFIKI/YOUTUBE)

“I wanted an event that would examine exactly what these structures are in country-specific contexts”

used to ensure that the process of nation-building, or (after we inevitably abolish our borders) community-building, on the continent is a truly decolonial project.

The *lgbtq@Cam* programme has invited three incredible panellists to tackle these very questions at a screening that has been co-sponsored by the university’s African Studies department. In chairing the panel I hope to come away from the evening with a set of new tools. A greater understanding of the inherent contradictions involved in building an anti-colonial nation state. A stronger capacity for solidarity across nations within the continent; the chance to learn about the different ways that LGBT+ Africans define themselves and their experiences. Another weapon against patriarchy to better articulate the ways in which feminist and sexual justice goals are inextricably tied. And hope for an African future in which the politics that has emerged within communities of sexual minorities is championed in the decolonial struggle and, in the process, used to create new communities that recognise the creative function of difference in our lives. My primary reasons are selfish: I want to understand myself better and see where my politics and I fit within the political climate in Kenya and other African countries.

Rafiki will be screened at the Bateman Auditorium at Gonville & Caius College on Wednesday 28th November. The screening will be followed by a reception and panel event.

Opinion



Colleges are improvising when met with abuse claims. It's time for this to change.

A student changed colleges following her old college's treatment of her experience of intimate partner abuse. She speaks about how survivors could be better protected at a college level

Sophia Cooke

Content note: This article contains references to sexual assault, intimate partner abuse, and PTSD

Last year, I reported to the Police and my college that my partner, another PhD student, had been emotionally and physically abusing me. He was arrested, and the case went to trial seven months later. In those months, I experienced the chaos of my college's attempts to deal with the situation, something it was clearly unprepared for, and consequently suffered a great deal of further emotional trauma.

Currently, a student can report sexual violence or intimate partner abuse to the University through the informal or formal disciplinary procedure. The informal procedure (instigated under the Breaking the Silence campaign in 2017) has been an important step forward for the University, although the formal disciplinary procedure is still not well set up for issues such as these.

Alternatively, they can report to their college. Most colleges, however, lack clear protocols, which results in the handling of such reports varying greatly. This leads to inconsistent and unpredictable responses, often involving staff members who are untrained in dealing with these issues. As in my experience, the effects of this can be disastrous for already-traumatised students.

With no protocol in place, the College my ex-partner and I both attended had to improvise. When he was charged (with criminal damage and assault), College initially banned him from the premises. I was suffering from PTSD, struggling to

come to terms with what had happened to me and desperately in need of support, stability and safety, with which the ban helped. However, he quickly appealed against it, and was supported in doing so by staff members he was close to.

The process that followed was one of extreme unpredictability, which severely impacted my mental health. A meeting of college tutors was arranged, to which we were both invited to speak for five minutes. Being too terrified to talk about it, to a group of staff members I had mostly never met, I agreed to provide a written account of everything that had happened in the relationship. I felt very uncomfortable sharing this but was desperate for the risk he posed to me, both physically and mentally, to be understood. I felt my life in College would be rendered impossible if he was allowed back in.

The ban was retained, but for only half of College. However, this did not last long – more appeals, meetings and hearings followed. Each time, I would suffer debilitating panic, rendering me incapable of doing anything until the uncertainty was resolved. Providing information for these meetings caused me to relive everything I had gone through, exacerbating my PTSD. To make things worse, some fellow students were also involved in discussions about the ban, and it was suggested that I should ask them to which events I should go and to which my ex-partner could. I was even uninvited from some events, which left me feeling very hurt and low. During the relationship, my ex-partner had power

over me. Here, he was able to affect my life and intimidate me still.

After several more changes, he was given full access to College, at certain times of the week. This whole process had taken over two months and involved, I was told, around twenty members of staff. I should have been reassured and made to feel safe, but instead felt judged and not understood. I was desperately trying to rebuild both my confidence and my trust in others. This process had added both to my anxiety of not being believed and the feeling of worthlessness my ex-partner had instilled in me.

Without the proper training required to handle these situations, staff members can cause serious harm to victims. The staff members who had supported my ex-partner, for example, continued to make it clear they did not believe me. They brought him into College on days he was banned, and actively voiced their opinion on the case with other students, going so far as to judge and criticise my family and me. One even contacted my department suggesting I shouldn't be there, shortly after my ex-partner had seen me walking in.

I am incredibly grateful for the very kind support I received from other staff members. However, with so many members of staff involved, some of whom fell out over the matter, I felt trapped in a chaotic and unpredictable situation which made me extremely anxious and prone to panic. I felt many staff members did not appreciate the impact of the situation on my mental health, and it sometimes felt as if I was considered half

▲ **Illustration by Kate Towsey for Varsity**

the problem, rather than a victim.

After the trial, in which he was found guilty of criminal damage but not of assault, the ban was fully lifted. I asked to move to a new college, where fortunately I have been welcomed, believed and publicly supported. This has been instrumental in helping me feel I can belong in Cambridge again, but it has taken me a long time to recover from the trauma I experienced.

If my old college had policies to handle a situation like this, many of the stressful and humiliating events I experienced could have been avoided. Situations like these allow perpetrators, who can be extremely adept at manipulating both systems and people, to exercise this ability. It is vital that colleges either have trained staff and clear survivor-focused policies in place to deal with situations like mine, or work to support students through an improved central University procedure.

After moving to my new college, I released a blog and a series of articles about my experiences. I have also been campaigning for universities in England, including Cambridge, to acknowledge intimate partner abuse as an issue among students. Cambridge has listened, and has proposed including it in the University regulations. This is, of course, fantastic, but it is not enough. What also needs to change is the way issues like these are handled, not only by the wider University body, but by individual colleges too. By writing this article, I hope to prevent other survivors from going through the experiences I did.

“Many of the stressful and humiliating events I experienced could have been avoided”

Dear Cambridge, I'm not buying it

Cambridge's latest marketing video is beautiful. It paints the picture of a world leading, progressive institution, but is it really?

Joe Cook

“What should Cambridge do next?” It is a question at the heart of debates over divestment, University links with arms companies and ongoing access failures. Perhaps surprisingly then for an institution that has seemed reluctant to act on the concerns of students and staff, it is also the question asked in the new video promoting the university's £2bn philanthropy campaign.

You have to give it to the video creators. Featuring beautiful interviews with famous faces such as David Attenborough, Stephen Fry, Clare Balding and George the Poet, it portrays a world leading, progressive institution, aware of the responsibility it has to the world and ready to adapt and change. The sleek website for the campaign - 'Dear World... Yours, Cambridge', is similar, focusing on the “new and daunting challenges” that “our planet faces”, with an emphasis on how Cambridge University's “ideas and insights are needed to solve them”.

It is a nice prospect and a great marketing campaign. However without action to follow up these bold claims it is just that: another spin victory for Cambridge.

Cambridge University is undoubtedly a world leader and its researchers have contributed a great deal to society. From numerous Nobel Prize winners to great small scale initiatives such as Learning Together, a program run by two criminology professors that has had transforma-

“Without action to follow up these bold claims it is just that: another spin victory for Cambridge”

tive effects on the lives of prisoners and students alike, it would be crazy to argue that Cambridge has not contributed to the world in many positive ways.

I don't doubt Vice-chancellor Stephen Toope's sincerity when he claims in the video that he wants “Cambridge to be a university that does not only reflect the society it serves but one that makes it better”. He claimed in a meeting with student representatives in April that in his self-described “servant leadership role”, he has little power to change things because he lacks authority over those in the University who do not report directly to him. Even though this was a questionable claim, it's a fact that the entrenched traditions and institutional power of colleges mean that the issues the University faces extend beyond the highest level of management.

However, we must consider whether the University's current actions demonstrate this commitment to improving society beyond the scope of its marketing strategy. The University has an estimated £337m invested in fossil fuel industries, while colleges hold around £20.7m, plus £6.5m in investments in arms companies. Meanwhile colleges pay hundreds of staff under the Living Wage in one of the most expensive cities in the UK. Taking one example: as of this summer Freedom of Information requests revealed that, King's College, renowned for its comparatively left-wing values, paid 114 workers below the Liv-

ing Wage, while spending an estimated £19,498 on wine.

It is telling that when the University website titles a section “enhance our environment” they discuss the collegiate system, libraries and museums, not facing up to their own impact on the environment through links to fossil fuel companies. To take just one example, engineering freshers were presented with data booklets sponsored by Shell this year.

When the marketing video features the much loved David Attenborough discussing how “the generation of energy... has caused so [many] problems with the production of carbon dioxide”, there is unsurprisingly no mention of the University's investments in fossil fuel companies. After all, this is a “small investment fund”, as Toope said in an open meeting with staff and students earlier this year, but one that proponents of divestment claim is large enough to be able to pressure some of the world's largest companies into changing their behaviour.

I remember watching Zero Carbon protesters at the start of first year shouting about “Corporation Cambridge” and the “marketisation of the university” and dismissing them as too radical. Yet with marketing campaigns like this, making claims about the need to “be bold in pursuing its mission” of contributing to society, it seems that Cambridge has even found a way to marketise the calls

for it to change.

It is not that Cambridge University should not be marketing, or should be discussing their problems in their pitches for donations. However when they use calls for change in order to solicit those donations it would be less frustrating if there was some meaningful action in tackling these issues, so that Cambridge really can make society better. Who knows, maybe with £2bn in new donations Cambridge will be able to live up to this mission, afford to take a stand by divesting from fossil fuels and arms and pay their workers fairly?

There is no doubt that it is up to the elite donors and alumni to make their own mind up about if they would like to give their money to the University. With such a well made marketing campaign I wouldn't blame them.

But I hope they bear a thought for the estimated 85,000 children who have died of malnourishment in Yemen country since the Saudi-led coalition launched an air strikes campaign in 2015. Although they deny complicity in reported war crimes in Yemen, BAE Systems signed a deal to provide 72 fighter jets to the Saudis in 2014.

The company is listed on the University website as having previously been one of the Cambridge's “industrial partners”. Is this what Toope has in mind when he talks of Cambridge being “a university that does not only reflect the society it serves but one that makes it better”?

The study of history here is not in a good place. Why are we so reluctant to change it?

True decolonisation of the history curriculum will not occur until we realise that non-white narratives would enrich the discipline as a whole

Freya Lewis

The study of history in the UK is not in a good place. This much was clear as soon as I arrived in Cambridge: despite being enthralled by the charms and challenges of the University, I was acutely aware that I was struggling to find fellow BME history students and staff. The decolonisation of the history curriculum may seem like well-trodden ground to some - this article is by no means the first to call out the discipline for its Euro-centricity and whiteness.

However, the shameful statistics found by Royal Historical Society's 'Race, Ethnicity & Equality' report, and the fact that the UK has waited until 2018 to have its first black female history professor, demonstrates that these discourses have not been taken far enough. Now we know that there is a problem, we need to search for its origin to have any chance of finding a solution. We need to ask ourselves the question: why are we so seemingly reluctant to diversify history in the UK?

Part of the reason we approach the diversification of history with such apathy in the UK is that we do not see the need to incorporate BME narratives into a majority-white discipline. Although I by no means want to see the study of BME narratives dominated by white historians, we need to rid ourselves of

the expectation that certain histories are only important to certain people. I am sure that many BME students studying history will share the same bemusement I do that, whenever a topic vaguely concerning our heritage or experience arises, the onus is on us alone to care and to understand its importance.

We are still attached to the outdated assumption that only black academics care about Africa; that only Asian heritage academics care about Asia and so on. And, if we work on this hypothesis, what's the point of integrating BME narratives into the history curriculum when only 6.3% of history staff identify as BME and only a tiny proportion of black students study history at A-Level or university level? The issue becomes imbued with a degree of complacency - due to the assumption that the majority will be unaffected.

However, this is a belief based on entirely false premises. If there is a seeming lack of interest in BME narratives, this is the product of a narrow curriculum which continues to disregard them, not a genuine rule that people only care about histories very obviously related to their own heritage. Decolonising the history curriculum is not just about meeting the needs of non-white students (although this should be a priority considering the diversity statistics recently unearthed by

the RHS report) but about enriching the discipline as a whole. In this respect, I implore a long overdue departure from the mentality that diversifying history will somehow ‘dumb it down’. Pervading our discipline there is a potent, unspoken fear: the fear that the status and academic rigour of history will be somehow undermined by the proper integration of BME narratives.

We see this in the teaching of so-called ‘world history’ in universities - which attempts to cram a plethora of non-European experiences into one non-compulsory paper - and the way in which BME narratives are pushed to the peripheries of the curriculum. The Atlantic slave trade may constitute a tiny sub-section of a British economic history paper, or we may scratch the surface of exploring the concept of ‘race’ in one lecture. Why do we feel the need to ‘other’ these historical narratives and keep them separate from British and European history? Why do we not give them the time and space on the curriculum they deserve?

I for one am convinced that these issues stem from an inherent elitism entrenched in the historical discipline, an elitism we are unprepared to face up to. At present, the inclusion of BME narratives is merely a quick break from reality, an afterthought before we hurry back off

“We need some real change: more BME academics, more BME students, and more respect for those already in the field”

to study ‘proper’ history. I hate to disappoint, but this is not an adequate substitute for decolonisation. Painting over the cracks with tokenistic gestures, and then scuttling off to our safe havens of elitism, will not fix history's quite frankly alarming diversity problem. We need, as clichéd as it may sound to some, ‘real change’: more BME academics, more BME students and more respect for those already in the field.

The study of history in the UK suffers from a crippling lack of diversity and historians seem reluctant to face the problem, due to a long-standing complacency surrounding integrating BME narratives and fears of ‘dumbing down’ the subject. We need to ask ourselves the question: why are we so scared of diversifying history? This will be a reflexive, uncomfortable question to ask: we've been up in the ivory tower so long, we're scared to look down and evaluate ourselves through the lens of race and ethnicity. However, it is what needs to happen. UK historians need to start having earnest conversations about how to seriously improve the diversity of our subject. For too long we have paid lip-service to the issue, or simply recognised that there is a problem and then hoped it would just go away. Students and staff deserve more than that, as does the future of our discipline.

Opinion

Student activism and local politics should go hand-in-hand in Cambridge

Students have an explicitly political and powerful voice as both residents of Cambridge and members of the University

Padraig Cuffe

Last week's march once again proved that Cambridge students will not tolerate injustice silently. As student activists are well aware, studying at Cambridge gives us unique leverage over the University and its colleges. This is a rare opportunity, one available to very few, which we can use to change things for the better. But the mirror image of this opportunity is often forgotten – we have another voice, an explicitly political voice, as residents of Cambridge.

When students push back against injustice, we do not have to look far to find it. Cambridge has previously been ranked the most unequal city in the UK, with the bottom 20% of earners taking home only 2% of total income, and we can see the consequences every day. There's no hiding from it.

My college, for example, had an income which outstripped its expenses by more than £5 million pounds in 2016-2017; it spent almost £20,000 on wine for events last year. Yet when I look out of my window at night, I can see the rough sleepers shelter under the shop fronts opposite.

There is, at least, a way we can try to right these wrongs, but it's not glamor-

ous. It's called local politics.

Already the idea may seem faintly ridiculous. "Local politics?" you might ask. "Can you even get anything done at a local level?" The answer is a resounding yes. In fact, we have greater political power here and now than most of us will have ever again in our lives.

Students make up about one in five Cambridge residents. In many election wards across the city, vote margins are so small that even tiny fluctuations in student turnout can flip them one way or the other. This combination of factors gives us a rare opportunity to make a meaningful difference, and it's one we cannot let slip.

Local politics does have an image problem. It can look pointless, petty, and slow. But on the ground it looks like building hundreds of new council homes, helping one thousand households avoid homelessness through a homelessness prevention strategy, driving businesses towards paying a living wage, and campaigning for the county council to divest from its £90 million investments in fracking. These are core, bread-and-butter issues for student activists, tackled by a method which is too often forgotten.

This is not to accuse student activists of having completely neglected local politics. Nevertheless, the unique opportunities provided to us by living in Cambridge are too often overshadowed by the opportunities provided by studying at the University. Local politics is rarely splashed across the front page of *Varsity*. Our voice within the University is amplified, while our voice within the city is muffled.

By this point, some may be wary of where this argument is headed. Am I arguing that student activists should forget trying to change the University, and turn all their energies to local politics? Absolutely not! There is no tradeoff to be struck between the two opportunities. Our dual voices, as students and as residents of Cambridge, are stronger when united.

In applying pressure on the University to change, there are few tools better than allied political offices. From Cambridge MP Daniel Zeichner's calls for divestment, to Cambridge City Council's support for college Living Wage campaigns, having local political power on your side is an advantage which should not be underestimated.

Sometimes it can seem like the Uni-

versity has all the institutional power stacked in its favour; it pays to remember that we have our own, democratic sources of institutional power which we can turn to in response.

Local politics has one final advantage which should help tempt the warriest of activists. The lowest level of commitment – registering to vote, making sure your friends are registered to vote, and actually turning out on the day – is quick, simple, and can still make a decisive impact. For those who would like to dedicate more time and energy, there is rich and varied scope for that too.

Even outside of local politics, charitable causes offer immense opportunities to make a difference in Cambridge. Local charities are always enthusiastic about the support of students, and engaging in charitable work – volunteering with a food bank or homelessness charity, for example – is one of the most direct ways students can help those in need.

Most important of all is that we simply remember what comes with living in a city as unequal and politically maleable as Cambridge: a strong political voice, and the duty to use it.

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and as
residents of
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We must not allow Oxbridge's access problem to fuel elitism within top professions

Improving access will break the dominance of those from privileged backgrounds in the most competitive careers

Charlotte Lillywhite

The access debate in Cambridge is usually focused on acceptance into the institution. Having previously directed my column toward discussing the way in which this neglects a class-related discussion of post-admissions access within Cambridge life, I think it is also vital to recognise how this continues to affect life post-university.

Figures show that inequalities faced by young people prior to becoming Cambridge students are not erased by a Cambridge education. The Sutton Trust's 2016 Leading People Report exposed how independently-educated Oxbridge grads saturate the highest-paying careers: those who went to private school constitute 74% of those in the judiciary, 61% in medicine, 51% in journalism and 50% in cabinet politics. From this, 74% of professionals in the judiciary, 54% in journalism, 47% in cabinet politics and 40% in medicine went to Oxbridge.

If this blatant inequality hasn't hit you hard enough yet, consider the fact that only 7% of children are educated privately and just 1% of the population attended Oxbridge. Let's not forget that those who went to grammar school – another institution that research has

shown to be dominated by privilege – are included within the state school statistic. This insulated, elitist environment, completely alien to most people, is being given the loudest voice and not enough people are talking about it.

Let's put Cambridge's role in even greater focus. In April, *Varsity* reported that between 2006 and 2016, over a third of Cambridge students were educated at only 100 schools.

And, no, the domination of top career pathways by private-schoolers and Oxbridge students is most certainly not because they are naturally more skilled. Privilege correlates to success, not intelligence. For students attending a Russell Group University with one A* at A level, state school students were likely to perform better than their privately-educated peers.

Yet a 2017 report by the Social Mobility Commission warned that, at the current rate of progress, it would take 120 years before underprivileged young people are as likely as their wealthier peers to gain A level or equivalent qualifications. Parents send their children to private schools not because of the grades they promise, but because of the privileges they guarantee, including a golden ticket to Oxbridge and

“The liberalism of many Cambridge students is not a substitute for the presence of actual diverse socio-economic experience”

top professions.

Of course, colleges are not responsible for the many deeply-entrenched years of privilege which arrive on their doorsteps each year, but they are responsible for their choices beyond this: the proportion of students from various backgrounds they accept and the extent of their own outreach efforts being two immediately obvious examples. Them not combatting the elitism at play within society at large, has far-reaching and unacceptable consequences.

Not only does wealth serve as a much higher guarantee of success, but it threatens to lock it into a vicious cycle. The Oxbridge graduates who occupy positions of power choose their successors, enabling inequality to prosper. Elitism breeds elitism.

Are we really going to continue to allow the most privileged one percent of our population to dominate areas as vast and influential as politics, law, medicine and the media? We must remember that these are careers which put people in prison, save lives, and decide key sociopolitical issues. What's more, those within these fields are the leading figures who claim to represent the underrepresented, the marginalised and disadvan-

tagged. Many of our journalists, doctors, lawyers and MPs have experienced life through an intensely privileged lens, undeniably blurring their understanding of the issues affecting the non-elite.

It is so easy to forget this when we come into contact with the wealth of liberal and progressive minds here at Cambridge. But the liberalism of many Cambridge students is not a substitute for the presence of actual diverse socioeconomic experience. Cambridge must open its doors to a wider pool of students if it is to justify its place as a top university, capable of bringing out some of the best talent and contributing this to the jobs market.

Ultimately, the University, as a stronghold of privilege, will perpetuate the inequality of post-university career paths, or become a bastion of change. Its role is not just to educate the students who arrive on its doorstep, but to actively seek out those whose schools or backgrounds aren't historically connected to the doors of its colleges. Its estrangement from reality perpetuates and enables the alienation of the less privileged from top careers, a practice that has no place in the fairer and more equal society for which we must aim.



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Photographed by Sarika Datta



Kettle's Yard is embedded in Cambridge's artistic and cultural history. *Vulture* shot in the home-turned-gallery of Jim Ede, inspired by his philosophy of harmony and balance, and his belief that art should be lived in, not simply observed.

Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge. Free Admission.



◀ Kettle's Yard was conceived with students in mind, with curator Jim Ede holding 'open house' afternoons during term time

(SARIKA DATTA)

Photography: Sarika Datta.
MUA: Majida Begum.
Models: Jessica Kayode-newman and Alex Spencer.
Creative Directors: Vivienne Hopley-Jones and Julia Davies.

The myth of blind casting

Mariam Abdel-Razek explains why we are kidding ourselves when we claim to be casting blind, and what we should do instead

The first musical I ever saw live was *Legally Blonde*. I was nine years old, hadn't even seen the film version (my mum had a thing against 12-rated movies), and, by the end of the show, I was completely in love. I went on to see it live twice more. I learned the score backwards, met Sheridan Smith at the stage door, and, most importantly, I wanted to be Elle Woods.

I don't mean that I wanted to be a lawyer or go to Harvard, or find a hot but stupid boyfriend who could dump me so that I could realise I was better than him (though all three were dreams I did have, and have taken an embarrassingly long time to relinquish). I mean I wanted to be dressed in pink, standing on that stage, and belting an Act One closing number with a chorus of backing singers.

I expressed this secret desire of mine to a friend a few years later. She gave me a funny look.

"Really?" she asked. "You?"

"Well, I have the range," I replied. (In retrospect a bold statement for a twelve-year-old, as I simply didn't.) "Why not?"

"Do you not think you're not quite the right

type?" she said, cryptically.

Of course, what my friend meant by saying I wasn't the "right type" was that I wasn't blonde – and, more to the point, you couldn't slap a wig on me and pretend I was, because I wasn't white. And it didn't matter if I had the range or not: it was something a little past the traditional suspension of belief.

What my twelve-year-old self was encountering for the first time was the fact that as much as the body can be an actor's most valuable tool, it can also be a restriction. Unlike music, where auditioning behind a screen is hardly unheard of, you have to be seen in an audition room for an acting part: that's part of the deal.

In Cambridge we seem to have fallen into the concerning (and incorrect) pattern of pretending that our theatre scene is somehow above this preoccupation with looks. We have told ourselves, perhaps, that it may be an unfortunate aspect of the professional acting world, but that amateur drama is not only removed from this idea, it is committed to ensuring that it doesn't permeate our casting processes: we use words such as 'race-blind' and 'gender-blind'.

The fact of the matter is, there is actually no such thing as casting race-blind, because we're not blind. Any director who sits in an audition room – regardless of their ethnicity or background – is affected by a basic element of race theory, which is unconscious bias. When a person walks into a room, delivers a speech or song, and suddenly "feels right" to the director for a part, no one in that room, on either side of the casting process, has

a firm idea of how much of that is because, in addition to their skill, they visually fit a pre-existing idea of that part. And this is so difficult to examine further is because the bias is unconscious. The director is not deliberately prejudiced, but affected by what they've seen and heard and understood as a member of a biased society.

If unconscious bias is at play in everything we cast (which we simply must accept is true, for all members of the theatre community), then its power is amplified tenfold in pieces of theatre which have characters at their centre that already exist as a shared visual idea in public consciousness. We then have a situation where a person of colour (for example) who wishes to be considered for a part that is not traditionally "assigned" to them within the show is having to work ten times as hard to do so. If they're then cast, the director faces the choice of whether or not to embrace this clear break away from the typical figure that would exist in the universe of the show and make it a point within the production. For example, if you cast a person of colour as Rolf in *The Sound of Music*, are you going to address through allusion the natural paradox that this creates or pretend it doesn't exist? Is a BME Iago in *Othello* a demonstration of internalised racism? If you're a white director, are you even equipped to make these choices?

My point is not that these issues are ones we should shy away from. On the contrary, they are interesting challenges bound to invigorate our already exciting theatre community. But we're not actually reminding ourselves that they exist. And what I am trying to say is

that there seems to be a prevailing ignorance and disappointing lack of commitment to attempting to understand the implications of a programmed season with regard to visual politics, and it's holding back our theatre's accessibility.

It's not enough for directors to say when proposing a show that they will cast blind. It's more important that there is real energy in balancing out casting processes, and exploring the role unconscious bias has within them (a subject that in any other profession is regularly flagged and discussed). In programming our larger-scale shows that are intended to reflect to a wider community the best and brightest talents we have to offer, both on and offstage, we would do better to find and shortlist shows that leave as little room as possible for unconscious bias to be sitting in an audition room alongside a directing team.

There are no necessary easy fixes to our accessibility problems in Cambridge theatre – and even if there were, it wouldn't be my sole place or responsibility to offer them, but a shared one across the community. We could start, perhaps, by appointing an access officer (a professional, not a student) to our theatre, or making adjustments to the requirements of pitching processes, or even keeping the Marlowe BME Shakespeare production from consistently being programmed at alternative venues. Whatever we decide, we need to stop treating identity politics as an afterthought in theatre. It's not. It's vital to creating a community that reflects all the members of it – as joyously diverse, different and individual as they are.

A brief inquiry into the 1975

Lottie Reeder reflects on the band that made the soundtrack of many of our teenage years



▲ Healy in the band's music video for 'Give Yourself A Try' (YOUTUBE/THE 1975)

December, 2016: Matty Healy stumbled on stage at the O2 with a rose in his mouth and a glass of wine in his hand. He tripped over his sentences, attempting to give words of wisdom, before surrendering, "Let's just sing some songs," and, "Fuck politics, let's dance." 'A Change of Heart' sounded like a flat can of coke. He tangled himself in microphone wires, before kissing the technician that came out to assist, crying a weak, "Help me." In American popstar Halsey's song 'Colors', outspokenly written about him, she condescendingly sings, "I hope you make it to the day you're 28 years old." I insured my tickets.

Yet it was one of the best concerts I had ever been to in my life. It was otherworldly. The only thing that unsettled me was his state. Having loosely spoken about a 'past tense' cocaine addiction in interviews, illustrated in songs such as 'UGH!' And 'Milk', it didn't seem so past tense. Yet the crowd cheered louder at his moments of instability.

My relationship with The 1975 has developed and fluctuated over six years, more so than any other band. In the earlier years, I hijacked the aux at house parties in the later hours, to play their mellow songs – 'You', 'Me', 'Medicine' – when people had stopped paying attention. Painfully cinematic, each song felt episodic as you sat through it. To me then, the music embodied emptiness, hollowness – a tragic epitome of teenage years. It haunts me now.

At 16, my shift in opinion coincidentally corresponded with the release of the singles from their second album, as well as a shift in

critical opinion. I had an enlightenment moment, when I spoke to Lucas Jones, (frontman of local band The Rose Affair) who pointed out that Healy knows his fan base, how they react and pick up on subtleties and references in the lyrics and videos – he can market a band. Although this took the shine off, I finally started to see them as they were, shaking off what had manifested itself as an unhealthy relationship with the band. I no longer turned to their music when I was down – they became real party songs, to dance and release to. I am so glad that I was able to see them live with this realisation, as I may have been disappointed otherwise. I see their albums as atmospheric, energetic indie/pop explorations, peppered with occasional downbeat sentimentalities.

By chance, reviews of the band took a 180. Having been cruelly awarded 'Worst Band of the Year' (which, I believe, is purely due to music critics' irrational hatred for bands that have a large teen-female following) by NME, they received 'Best Live Band'. Despite being one of the most controversial bands currently on the circuit, mostly due to their frontman's antics, musically they are fantastic. Once the songs can be separated from the personality and the fan base, their talent shines through, and this can be said for all their work, not just the critically acclaimed *I like it when you sleep*.

This does not eradicate the fact that Matty Healy is outrageously problematic. He steals, but gets away with it by being friends with those he's robbed, (take LCD Soundsystem's 'All My Friends' against 'Sex', they even have the same first line) despite preaching authen-

ticity. Undoubtedly, he believes he has some answers to life's unanswerable questions. I feel that the band gains so much from him, but equally loses credibility as a band; it's not uncommon that listeners do not know the other members. This is unsurprising: he is the only one to talk during live shows, he does the interviews. A lot of the fans elevate him to a divine status, when I can't help feeling they are brainwashed to try and find truth in a drug-induced bumble.

I should refine this – pre-2018 Matty Healy. Now, at 29, he is out of rehab, supposedly off heroin, healthier looking and more articulate in the few interviews he's done. It is difficult to judge the authenticity of his character: the extent to which his cocky front was drug-induced, or whether it is his personality. Now he is allegedly clean, the contrast should show. 'Sincerity is Scary', he writes, and up until this point, I do not think he has been sincere. From the five singles released, I get the distinct impression of a self-realisation; he has encompassed the clichés of a rock star and is reflecting on them, almost parodying himself. For the first time, I feel that The 1975 are no longer trying to do something monumental, and by doing that, they are.

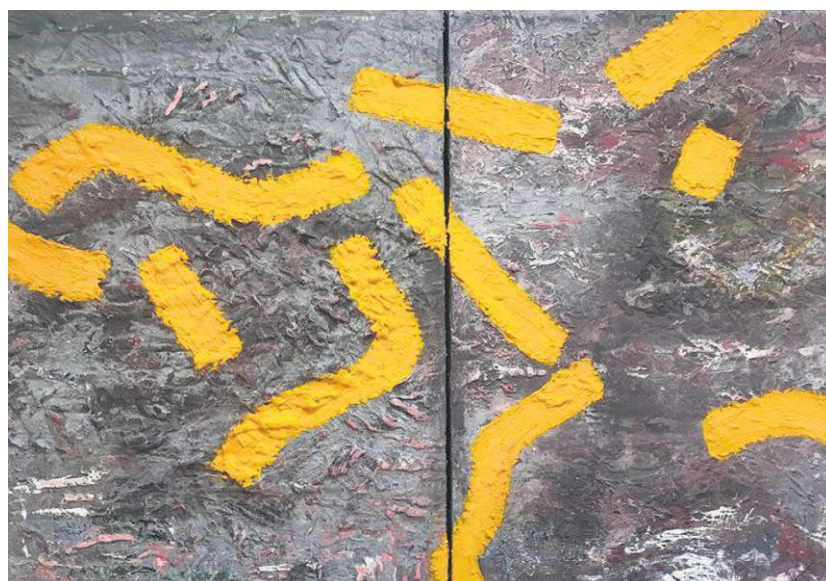
When asked about the lyric content of 'Give Yourself a Try', Healy suggested that there is no point picking apart art sometimes, as the meaning will fluctuate. I found that to appreciate the music in its entirety, you have to stand back and treat it at surface level. I am looking forward to approaching the new era of the 1975 in this way, particularly seeing the new Matty Healy in action in January, again preaching to an arena.

'Disguises, Disguises, Disguises' exhibition review

Delving into the works of fine arts students at ARU, Emma Morgan gives an overview of the new exhibition at the Ruskin gallery

Anglia Ruskin's BA Fine Art Exhibition, *Disguises, Disguises, Disguises*, is a simultaneous masking and unmasking, an exploration of the public personas which whitewash the private reality they conceal. It is a collection which stages a journey beyond the visible surface of Generation Z, touching on the anxieties and the desires which flicker beneath. Concentrating on work produced by second years at the Cambridge School of Art, this exhibition allows students to reflect their developing artistic identity to the public for the first time, as well as learning how to curate their work. Through painting, embroidery, collage, print-making and photography, these artists step up to the challenge, presenting us with an array of different techniques and perspectives, which unite in a thought-provoking and diverse demonstration of talent.

Perhaps the most arresting piece of the whole exhibition is David Chambers' *Lying Awake, You're Asleep*: two canvases painted thick with oily darknesses of green, grey and



▲ 'Lying awake, you're asleep', oil on canvas
(DAVID CHAMBERS)

black and streaked brightly with strong yellow lines. At first glance, the painting reminded me of the lights that flash across the insides of your eyes when you close them at night, and when I talked to David, he explained how, through the piece's writhing background, he'd wanted to evoke a sense of all of the 'sleeping thoughts', the barely conscious concerns and abstractions, which teem at the back of our minds as we fall asleep. He told me how he'd spent time building up and sanding down the layers of paint, working it up to and over

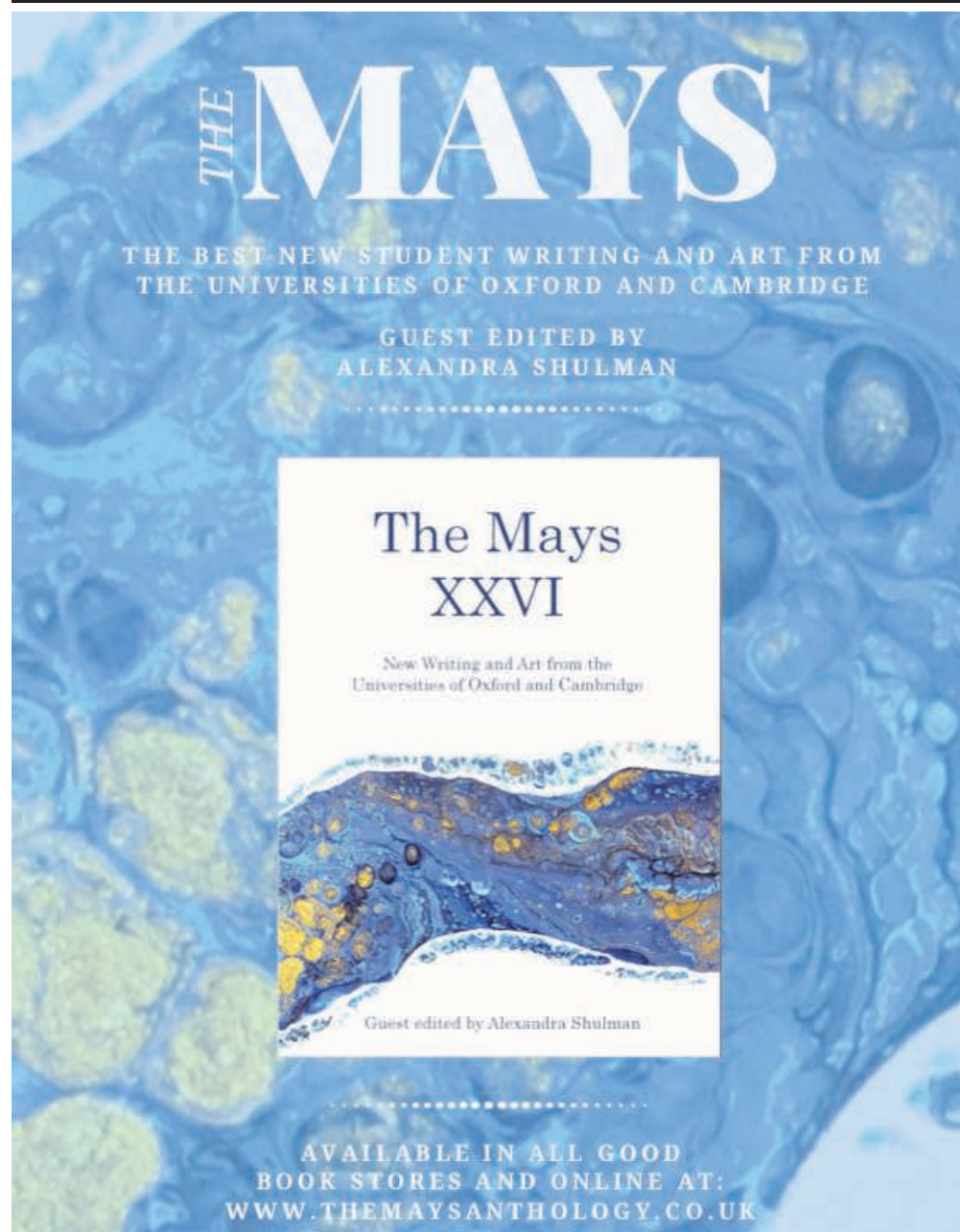
the edges of the canvas to make it more of an object than an image. In giving the textures of his paintwork such a tactile quality, he brings the clamour of suppressed thoughts that we'd rather ignore to the fore, so that they demand intimacy with the viewer, and refuse

to hide behind the more lucid ideas that we present to the world.

For these students, just as in the pieces that they create, art contains both private and personal dimensions. According to Kira, one of the most enjoyable aspects of the project was the 'open dialogue' which developed between her and her sister as they played around with the composition of her photograph. The private satisfaction at work behind the image is a central aspect of her love for art; she says that it makes her heart 'beat a little faster' with excitement when she sees her ideas visualised in the formal gallery setting. Other students have a more acute consciousness of public

reception: Willow Kirkby, creator of a series of collages addressing taboo subjects in our society, explains that she always begins her creative processes with a questionnaire, to start a conversation with the wider world and to place her pieces within a social context. She deliberately left her piece untitled, saying that she 'didn't want to name it for someone else', as this might limit the variety and openness of people's reactions to her ideas.

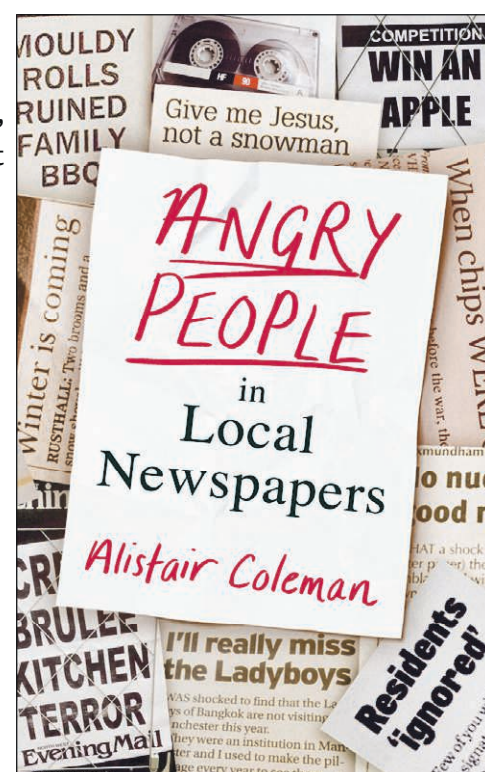
Public platforms such as Instagram have certainly shaped the way in which we distribute and receive creative works, and this new generation of artists are perhaps the first whose artistic consciousness was conceived and developed within this culture. When a person, scrolling through their newsfeed, stumbles across an image that they like, the hugely accessible and plural nature of such media platforms automatically encourages them to search for more of the same. Adept at the art of the Facebook stalk, they may then scour the artist's profile, forming their own impressions, not just of their material, but also of their personal identity. Art, and the person behind it, therefore become more consumable than ever before, transformed into something to be flicked through, screen-shotted and critiqued by anyone and everyone. It will be interesting to see how these emerging talents, bound up in this cycle of consumption, will tackle social media's propensity for falsified images of perfection, and continue exposing the less-than-perfect concerns of everyday life in their work.



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Third year is the time to play

Columnist Holly Platt-Higgins ponders her supervisor's analogy of first and second year at Cambridge as eating your vegetables



▲ Trinity Lane, Cambridge. June 2018. (VIVIENNE HOPLEY-JONES)

I remember coming to university with the expectation that it would be nothing like school. I was finally away from my tiny town in Kent, in a real, if equally tiny, city. I had my own key for the first time. I had a kettle. I no longer had to register my presence with anyone, at any point during

the day. Yes, I had finally entered the realms of both social and academic freedom.

Film likes *The History Boys*, *Starter For 10* and *The Theory of Everything* had filled me with fantasy and anticipation for what awaited beyond the drudgery of sixth-form and A-levels; I would be totally in control of what I did and when I did it and who I did it with. I imagined I would drink a lot of red wine and leisurely sit reading eighteenth-century poetry which I would later discuss with my DoS; who had obviously, become both my friend and mentor.

Rather disappointingly, this was not the case. The red wine I drink is pretty filthy because it's usually the cheapest option in Sainsbury's, I don't actually think my DoS likes me and, as it turns out, the first two years of my English degree were filled with compulsory papers which quite frankly didn't interest me at all. Spending eight weeks studying medieval literature, which actually isn't very good, didn't exactly stimulate me. In fact, I was so wholly disengaged with this particular paper, that two days before my Tripos exam I made the unfortunate discovery that I was required to complete two set text sections in the paper, rather than the single one I had been anticipating. Luckily, a friend of mine gave me her notes. With these and 48 hours of revision, I was just about able to fake a reasonable understanding of Troilus and Criseyde. (The spelling of whose name I have just had to google.)

But, when third year suddenly appeared, the rules of the game had changed. I went

into my first supervision of term, and after the obligatory 'how was your summer' conversation, my slightly wacky supervisor started expressing his excitement for the year ahead. He said something which has stuck with me over these last six weeks and I think aptly describes most arts students' experience with the first two years of Tripos, 'well' he said, 'the first two years are kind of like eating your peas; and now you've done that, you can get down and play.' While I wouldn't exactly say that the past six weeks of studying Tragedy has been an experience entirely synonymous with child-like playing, I get the point my supervisor was making. Once you've gone through all the compulsory-canon the university puts on your plate, you can broadly do what you want with the rest of your time here.

By the time you are allowed to pick your own texts and questions and be let loose on the unsuspecting faculty library, you're essentially equipped to do justice to what you're genuinely interested in; rather than butcher it as you no doubt would have don't in first year. Obviously I hate Tripos, in the way that everyone hates Tripos: it's stressful; there is a ridiculous amount of content; some of the questions you get given are a joke; no examiner's report has ever been encouraging in anyway at all, and at least half of the time you don't really know what you're doing but you keep doing it because you don't have time to stop and figure out what's you're really meant to be doing. But, if you think about it, the Tripos system is actually ingenious.

It probably takes about two years to bash

out all of your bad habits, forgetting the concept of learning objectives which you were no doubt inundated with at school. And, you go through this massive learning curve by testing yourself out and making your mistakes on the really old material, that you don't care about, which sits gathering dust at the back of the library. Only to arrive in your final year, with an enriched contextual catalogue, specific interests, direction, conviction, improved ability, a honed skill set – and only then, are you allowed the academic freedom you've been yearning for.

It's ingenious because it's conditioning. By your third year, yes, you're a much better student but also, you're incredibly grateful. Grateful to finally be relinquished from the clutches of 'compulsory' and able to swan about indulging in you academic interests. And although third year is much harder in terms of your work load, because it is always teetering on the edge of actually being enjoyable, of playing, you really don't resent it half as much as you would.

As usual, I'm drowning in work, but in a strange way I'm kind of enjoying it. Being submerged in thoughts about my dissertation and questions about how best to break into my weekly tragedy essay, doesn't make me the edgiest person in Cambridge, but it does make me feel like I made the right choice in coming here. Very rarely in life do things turn out as you hoped they would, but I feel like third year is being made bearable, by ultimately fulfilling my aspirations for my academic experience at university.

Elton John (Lewis)

In the leadup to Bridgemas, Fergus Lamb asks how an advert has taken centre-stage in our holiday festivities

Complaints about the corruption of Christmas are a boorish cliché of the season, as much a tradition as mulled wine, mince pies, and the Queen's speech. From the right, the accusation is that Christmas has become secularised, its religious content stripped to make it more palatable for the masses. Meanwhile, the left argue that commodification has ruined Christmas, that a celebration of community has become one of commerce. The two critiques are not as different as they originally seem – both maintain that Christmas used to mean more and now means less. However, it's not liberals, per se, who are responsible for stripping Christmas of its holy content, but neo-liberalism. As that great Santa impersonator, Karl Marx, once said: the logic of capital is such that 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.'

It is amidst this culture war that, as I walk back to college in the bitter cold, my phone pings: 'John Lewis debuts new Christmas advert.' There's a real absurdity to this: an advert has become such a feature of our holiday sea-

son that the thought of it can make me feel so warm inside. As one friend tells me; 'at least once I year I get in bed and watch all of them in a row and then cry.' How has this happened? They are often beautifully constructed, a combination of warm visuals, covers of popular songs, and nifty storytelling. It's probably indicative of our time that some of the best artists alive spend their time crafting adverts for a Highstreet Retail brand. I put the kettle on and settle in.

The advert opens on Elton John playing the piano in his big empty house. He's singing 'Your Song', which he wrote, and which has been covered countless times, from Ewan McGregor in *Moulin Rouge* to Ellie Golding in, well, a John Lewis Christmas advert.

As he plays, we're transported back through time as we see him perform multiple iterations of the song; he plays in stadiums, on planes, sporting a mohawk, in a recording studio, in a town hall. Now he's a child again, running down the stairs on Christmas morning and his mum and nan are there. He's tearing the wrapping paper off of his present: it's... a piano. It's the same piano he was playing in the opening shot. He begins to play and we're back in Adult Elton John's empty mansion. He closes his eyes. 'Some gifts are more than just a gift', reads the catchline.

Something about the advert feels off – maybe I've become older and more jaded (it's true that Christmas feels less special with every year that goes by.) There's a darkness to that final shot of Elton alone in his hall that can't quite be encapsulated by the advert's sticky sentimentality. He's like a latter-day version of Orson Welles' Charles Kane, the piano taking the place of 'Rosebud', the sledge that connects Kane with his happier but poorer childhood. When seen through the perspective of this loneliness, the rest of the

advert becomes an escape into nostalgia. The story of John's fame is played in reverse. As superficial evocations of past eras whiz past, we sense that the fantasy of the film is a search for meaning. This meaning isn't present in any of those famous people parties or the adulation of his fans, but only in his roots – the sitting room of his grandparents' council house where he lived whilst his dad served in the RAF and first played the piano. The genius of John Lewis' advert is to find in Elton John's story an analogy for a lonely Britain, a Britain besieged by the collapse of community that arrived with late-capitalism, one nostalgic for a post-war consensus when it seemed like that community existed.

Buried within the John Lewis advert, the heart of the British com-

modification of Christmas, amidst the shots of Elton John's childhood, there lies an image of hope. An image of what Christmas should and could be about. John Lewis has always understood that people, especially after the financial crash, are sick of the overconsumption of the Christmas period. This is why their adverts rarely feature more than one or two gifts. To an extent, John Lewis is using this cynically to associate their products (which aren't 'gifts that are more than just gifts') with this trend. However, they're also important because adverts now fulfil the function of traditional media – they're the medium through which we tell stories about ourselves.

Those distraught over the corruption of Christmas should take relief in this development. Within the very core of the commodification of Christmas hides a purer vision: family, love, community, the very things that we seem to have left behind.



▲ The advertisement shows stages in the life of Elton John (YOUTUBE - JOHN LEWIS & PARTNERS)



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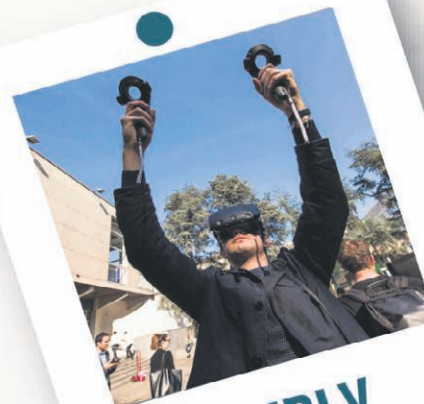
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Science

“For real progress, it’s about the balance between curiosity and drive”

Sir Jony Ive is the latest recipient of the Hawking Fellowship. Varsity reports on his inaugural speech, on ‘The Creative Process in a Team Setting’

Edwin Balani and Joseph Krol

The Hawking Fellowship, while a relatively new honour, is already starting to boast a remarkably strong list of recipients. Set up by the Cambridge Union Society last year, the inaugural award went to Professor Hawking himself; following his passing, it has since been renamed in his honour. The Fellowship is awarded annually by the Committee to a recipient who is both distinguished in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields and who has, in some way, influenced the progress of social discourse. In this second year of the Fellowship, it has been awarded to Sir Jony Ive, the London-born industrial designer who has headed Apple’s design team since 1992; over the years he has overseen such familiar projects as those of the overall looks of the iPhone, iPad and MacBook.

Ive opened his speech at the Union on Monday with a few remarks about the “surprise and sense of honour” he felt after receiving the award. A keen reader of Hawking’s works, he recalled that through them he “glimpse[d] the way that [Hawking] saw things”, especially the physicist’s strong concerns over the collective future of humanity. With these themes in mind, he launched into the speech proper, which he titled ‘The Creative Process in a Team Setting’. In the potted life story with which he started, he emphasised the idea of industrial designers as the creators of tools,

often springing from ideas and concepts rather than worldly absolutes, which then both reflect and shape the very fabric of society and culture.

He gives as an example a 2002 project he directed which centred on the development of multitouch technology. The broad idea would be that it would end up as natural and intuitive, and through the course of the design process the interface started to take on a remarkably familiar form – a series of specific, individual app interfaces with which the user interacts, each of which is designed with the purpose of the app in mind, rather than each having to submit to the same form.

“The starting idea wasn’t a direct response to any particular problem,” Ive explains; “indeed, the technology took years to catch up with ideas like this one”. However, after a lengthy process of customer-facing development, including a major focus on user opinions after interacting with a tangible product, it eventually reached its prime. That technology rose from quite humble beginnings into the massively influential software superstructure we call the App Store.

For Ive, this is just a single example of a unifying theme in his creative experience. “Problems are measurable,” he says, “they are easy to talk about, which is exactly why we tend to focus on them. But this totally problem-oriented approach can definitely be damaging.” He cites his experience of working in large design teams, in which he thinks it’s much harder to remain genuinely curious, since outside ideas quickly end up feeling somehow uncomfortable; “there’s a tendency for teams to gravitate back towards what is known rather than to what is unknown”. These teams would do well, in his opinion, to recentre their attitudes towards shared discovery and learning. “You have to suspend your disbelief,” he declares. With a

“This problem-oriented approach can definitely be damaging”



characteristic turn of phrase, he explains that the creative process is “fabulously terrifying”.

What, then, is the key to his colossal success in his creative field? “It’s about the balance between curiosity and drive, which is required to continually make real progress,” he claims. There are lots of occasions on which the smart move is to deeply explore issues, question received wisdom, and cast about for

revolutionary ideas, he says. But in the real world, there are also plenty of times when one needs a strong determination and resolve to focus on a single problem at hand in order to get through it, often when working towards deadlines. “It’s very demanding to have to switch between these two mindsets when the need arises,” he admits, “but it’s what needs to be done to bring great products to market.”

▲ Sir Jony Ive is the latest Hawking fellow (WIKIMEDIA)



Varsity explains The physics of rowing

Joseph Krol
Science Editor

How difficult can it be to explain something as simple as how a boat moves through the Cam? As it turns out, there’s probably more to it than you might have expected.

There are several structurally dis-

“To double their speed, each rower must put in about eight times as much effort”

tinct sources of drag on a rowing boat as it moves. For instance, some is generated on the base of the boat, essentially because as the boat moves quickly over stationary water, it accelerates the water directly below it, causing energy loss. However, the principal source of drag comes from perhaps the most intuitive source – the water hitting the profile of the boat as it moves along.

The Reynolds number, named for a Queens’ College mathematician, is a dimensionless quantity that essentially compares the strengths of the forces due to inertia and the forces due to viscosity in a system. On the scale of rowing boats, the Reynolds number turns out to be relatively high, and as such the inertial drag on the boat is roughly proportional to the square of the velocity. The power that the rowers must then exert in order to keep a steady speed is

given by the product of this force that they are working against and the velocity at which they are moving, making it proportional to the cube of the velocity. In other words, in order to double the speed at which they are travelling, each rower must put in about eight times as much effort.

Beyond simple heuristic arguments like this, the maths quickly gets very rather ugly. Indeed, the general equations describing this kind of flow are notoriously difficult to solve, with a million-dollar prize on offer ‘merely’ for proving that unique solutions exist in all cases.

Given that many of the specific studies only took place over the last couple of decades, with many avenues yet to be explored, it may well be a case in which the rowers’ intuition has outpaced even the most earnest fluid dynamicists.



▲ Rowing: more to it than meets the eye (LOUIS ASHWORTH)

What's the beef? How lab-grown burgers might be the saviour of humanity

Thea Elvin
Science Writer

Is it possible to grow a beefburger? The Cambridge Department of Clinical Neurosciences is pioneering a new method of growing specialised cells from stem cells that could lead the way in preventing a global food crisis.

Livestock farming has one of the largest environmental impacts of any industry, requiring a remarkable amount of natural resources. To produce just 1kg of beef requires 15,000 litres of water, almost as much as one year of showers. On top of this, the ethical arguments concerning raising an animal for slaughter are increasingly under question, leading many to seek alternative diets and food production methods.

The science fiction-like idea of growing meat in a lab is not a new one. Previous research in this area has been focused on the growth of muscle precursor cells; however, these not only have a limited lifespan, but require serum made from animals to keep them alive, meaning they aren't totally cruelty-free.

Dr Mark Kotter stumbled across a new solution to this problem when research-

“This alternative method may hold the answer to the problem of meat consumption”

ing a method for the rapid differentiation of pluripotent stem cells into specific cell types. Pluripotent stem cells are extremely adaptable and have the potential to differentiate into any of the three germ layers (the primary layer of cells that forms in an embryo).

Kotter was interested in the biomedical applications of growing these cells for treatment of diseases such as Alzheimer's and heart disease. Differentiating pluripotent cells is usually a complicated and lengthy process, and can take several months from start to finish; however, Kotter's research group has found a way to turn on a particular subset of genes allowing cells to grow in a matter of days, in a technique called OPTi-OX.

Kotter has since collaborated with Daan Luining, founder of the Dutch company Meatable, which will use the OPTi-OX technique to convert pluripotent cells into bovine muscle and fat cells and manufacture beef burgers. The method involves taking cells from the umbilical cord after a calf has been born and reprogramming them into an induced pluripotent stem cell, meaning that no animals need be harmed in the process. After an initial research and development period of three years, Meatable claims its meth-

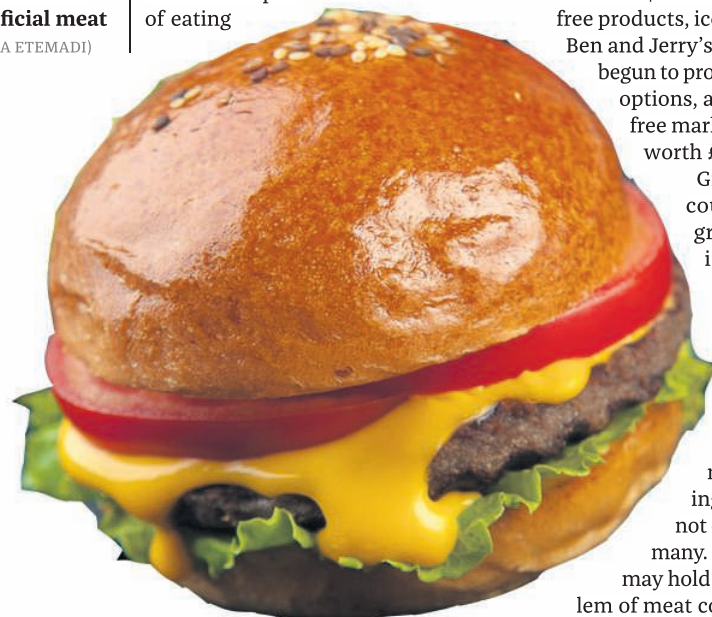
▼ **Dr Mark Kotter's development of the OPTi-OX technique is a major breakthrough in the production of artificial meat**
(ALIREZA ETEMADI)

ods will be able repeat the manufacturing cycle in three weeks or less, with one cell being sufficient to sustain the technique and “create enough burgers to feed the world”.

As this generation becomes more and more aware of the ethical and environmental implications of eating

meat, veganism is becoming increasingly popular. In a survey by The Vegan Society, it was estimated that there are 600,000 vegans living in the UK, almost quadruple the number there were in 2014. The food industry has also started to cater to this trend. Dairy company Danone invested \$60 million last year in dairy-free products, ice-cream brands such as Ben and Jerry's and Häagen-Dazs have begun to produce mainstream vegan options, and in 2017 the UK meat free market was estimated to be worth £527 million.

Growth of meat in a lab could help to meet the growing demands of an increasingly environmentally-conscious public. Despite its many negative repercussions, meat contains nutrients that a completely plant based diet cannot provide and switching to a meat free diet is not considered an option by many. This alternative method may hold the answer to the problem of meat consumption.



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Meet the Expert – Design Systems

How can you increase team output using time saving features? And how do you allow this with an easy system that allows both coordination and alignment? By using Design Systems! To introduce the topic to us, we have Paula who started working at Portaltech Reply 4 years ago as a UX/UI Developer.

Tell us about yourself

I studied graphic design but I see myself as a designer in general because it doesn't matter in which field you are: as a designer you will need to solve problems. I worked for more than 10 years as a graphics designer and now for almost 4 years, I jumped into front end and web applications when I joined Portaltech. It's not fully coding or designing, it is mainly about information.

Your education?

I was born in Mexico and studied most of my life in Mexico. I did some short speciality courses in Florence, Italy, but they were more focused on illustration and art and then some courses in Cologne in Germany. Nothing really related to technology or IT until I moved here, to Portaltech in London.

Can you introduce Design Systems to us?

A design system is an eco-system built with guidelines, rules and principles to solve a problem. The main thing is how to make this work in any context and be reusable at any time.

The basics of Design Systems?

They change the way you interact with your team. They make everything faster, and demand a clearer consistent code to rely on, so that anybody can reuse it easily. That's the basics of it.

Brad Frost defined it as atomic design. We tend to think things are complex and try to solve them in a complex way rather than the very small parts – that's where the atomic name comes from. The smallest part



Photo courtesy of Reply

of each component will help you to build the layers, and without the heart of this it won't work. It is clean reusable code.

The history of Design Systems?

There is a UI expert called Brad Frost. He pushed for this methodology of work. I can't say for sure that he's the one who started it, but he's the one who popularised it and standardised it for UI designers and coders.

NASA in 1976 were suggesting to have a similar way of work to the design systems we have now. To some, that would be the start.

How did you get involved with Design Systems?

I got really involved with it when I started working with specific clients. Sometimes you'd already be working in this way but you wouldn't realise that it was that mindset or concept.

How has the evolution of technology affected Design Systems?

I think in general everything is easier nowadays. Technology brings people closer, you can work simultaneously with

people on the other side of the world, you can share your work instantly so that helps a lot when you are trying to minimize the impact on resources and time. Everything is faster, cheaper (and it's getting cheaper and cheaper) but it's also changing every day. You can also share your work, check other people's work and keep learning.

The future of Design Systems?

We (UI designers) aim to keep working in that way, but it also depends on who's managing your team and sometimes you need to 'reeducate' clients. They have clear ideas of what they want but maybe it's not the best solution for them. So if we keep pushing to work in the current way, it'll become the standard for anything really.

How does Reply support your research and development?

In Portaltech, if you find a course or seminar or anything, basically show interest in keeping on learning, they will support you. You just have to let them know that "this is what I need" and they'll support you. You have to take ownership of your development into your own hands.

How does it feel to be in a growing company?

Before moving to London, I never thought about it, but now that I'm here it's really exciting! You see clients whose products you were using and now you get to look at the behind the scenes. For me it's exciting to see how they're working and how we can help them.

At the same time you're challenged to keep improving yourself and pushing yourself for higher quality work.

I'd just like to add, it doesn't matter if you're in front end, or back end or a business analyst, since technology is always changing, you too can always change. You can always learn.

Light Blues captain Kate Marks reflects on the past 30 years of the women's Varsity match

With the Varsity match only two weeks away, **Marcus McCabe** catches up with Cambridge University Rugby Union Football Club women's captain Kate Marks

CURUFC Women's captain Kate Marks is still in her training kit when I meet her in the stands of the Cambridge University rugby ground on Grange Road. She sits perfectly at ease looking out onto the newly-mowed playing field where the Light Blues have dominated their BUCS league once again this season. Cambridge rugby certainly seems to be her natural habitat.

And in her role as captain this year, the 30th anniversary of the Varsity match, one of her main objectives has been to unite the current success of the Cambridge women's rugby team with the players that have laid the foundations for their current success – all the way back to Sophia Peggers, the Cambridge captain who co-founded and won the first ever women's Varsity match against Oxford in 1988. Marks explained, "it's an honour to be a captain in an anniversary year and it's a chance for us to cement our links with our alumni and offer some thanks to them for everything that they have done to get us to where we are now, but also to inform the girls on what it was like back when those players started up the Varsity match in the first place."

"At the Varsity match we'll have celebrations specifically for the alumni. They will be providing the guard of honour when we run onto the pitch at Twickenham and standing with us on the pitch when we sing the anthem. Most of them never experienced the chance to play at Twickenham so for them to be able to come onto the pitch will hopefully go some way towards righting that wrong."

Marks is conscious of the fact that playing at Twickenham is a privilege

“There is nothing quite like a Varsity day. Seeing the stands full of the light blue colours of Cambridge makes for a very special occasion”

▼ CURUFC women after yet another win over Oxford Brookes (KATE MARKS)

that many female rugby players have not been able to experience, and stresses the role of the women's Varsity match in raising the exposure of women's rugby. "A lot of female internationals will never get the chance to play at Twickenham and it means a lot to have a game televised on BBC. Even though we are at the amateur end of the game, to actually be able to see women's rugby on the television in a historic stadium which has traditionally only had men playing in it is incredibly poignant and a huge step forward for the women's game."

Exposure leads to better financial sponsorship which in turn leads to the accelerated development of women's rugby – this is a pattern that recurs across women's sport. "I think finance is a huge barrier to participation and barrier to playing at that highest level and being able to access stadiums like Twickenham." But once the women's game gets the funding it deserves, Marks believes that the rest will naturally follow.

This is visible at CURUFC where, while there are still improvements to be made, the amalgamation of the men's and women's RFU clubs in 2013 has meant that both teams have access to Grange road and the same facilities. The success of the women's side in recent years is testament to the power of these equal opportunities.

Kate Marks of all people would appreciate the magic of Twickenham, having already triumphed at the home of rugby herself. She scored the third try from scrum-half in Cambridge's 24-0 demolition of Oxford there last year. It is both a cathedral and an amphitheatre, she reflects: "Playing at Twickenham is the pinnacle of quite a lot of rugby player's careers."

She says, "I don't think there is anything quite like walking onto that pitch and feeling the sense of gravity in that situation."

"Even when the stadium is empty there is a special aura. We're lucky enough that we get to go and have a kicking session the day before and feeling the quiet, the silence in the stadium the day before is almost as special as actually running out on Varsity day."

"But there is nothing quite like a Varsity day. Seeing the stands full of the light blue colours of Cambridge and friends and family being there as well makes for a very special occasion. As a team you



▲ Marks scored a try in last year's 24-0 Varsity win (KATE MARKS)

“There is nothing quite like a Varsity day. seeing the stands full of the light blue colours of Cambridge makes for a very special occasion”

build up a very strong bond in the lead up to the Varsity match so being able to step onto the pitch at Twickenham and know how much it means to every single one of the players makes it even more special than it would be if you were there on your own."

Indeed, Varsity is incredible for team-bonding, but it is also something that can be shared more widely. "We are on the amateur end of the game, so we can't be taking Twickenham and just enjoying it for what it is. We've got to be using that for some kind of social good as well and that to me is incredibly important part of the whole package of the Varsity match." Whether it be coaching and access work in inner-London schools, hosting mini Olympic games between local disability schools, or fundraising for mental health-awareness, Marks sees the club as having an impact outside the white lines of the rugby pitch.

On the field, of course, the women's rugby team have been going from strength to strength too. The Light Blues have won six games from six in convincing fashion and top BUCS Midlands 1A with an almost unassailable 15-point lead over second placed Worcester. But Marks is keen to avoid complacency: "I've loved being captain of a winning side. We've ... had some real successes and some really solid individual performances from play-

ers who have really, really developed this season. But I think I see my role now as to steady the ship. Those wins are great, but those wins are behind us now and actually going into the Varsity match is a whole different ball game."

So, over the coming few weeks, the Light Blues will be continuing what has worked for them so well so far. "We'll be building the intensity for another week and then things chill for a little bit. We have put in all the hard work – no-one could fault the girls for the effort they've shown this season. I'm incredibly proud of how far people have come and how much time people have put in. To be doing all of that training pretty much every day, sometimes twice a day, alongside a Cambridge degree is an impressive feat in itself and to be keeping your head above water is incredible; in the last week before Varsity all I want them to do is enjoy it."

On a final note, she added: "Last week we were lucky enough to go down and train with the Saracens squad in London so we're trying to keep pushing ourselves and making sure we aren't resting on our laurels. We'll be going into the Varsity game with a quiet confidence ... Oxford are a good side and any captain would be stupid not to recognize that. We love the feeling of winning and we don't want it to stop now."



The Varsity Michaelmas sports round-up: a term in review

Marcus McCabe
Sport Editor

The Men's Basketball Blues are top of BUCS Midlands 2B, winning all four of their matches thus far, including a thriller against Oxford Brookes covered by *Varsity*. The women, meanwhile, find themselves mid-table in Midlands 1A with three wins

and three losses to date.

Following the opening of two new hockey pitches at Wilberforce Road Sports Ground in October, the Men's Hockey Blues have won all four of their matches and sit atop BUCS South B, while the Women's Blues have had a slower start, winning two and losing five.

Before the start of term the men's

footballers went to the final of the World Elite University Football Tournament in Wuhan, China. In the league, the Blues have struggled somewhat, finding themselves in fifth position in BUCS Midlands 1A. The women enjoyed a stronger start to the season and find themselves in third position at the halfway point.

Both men's and women's tennis teams have started the season convinc-

ingly and both are in second position in their respective leagues. The badminton women's team are third while their male counterparts are in fifth.

Varsity watched the women's Lacrosse Blues come back to beat Exeter and since then they have continued to beat everybody in their path. They are six points clear at the top of BUCS Premier South with seven wins in seven games.

The women's Rugby Union Blues have achieved a similar level of domination in BUCS Midlands 1A, winning all six of their matches in one-sided fashion. The men's rugby Blues who don't participate in BUCS have also had a positive run in to the Varsity match, winning three, drawing one and losing one. Most recently, *Varsity* watched them beating Trinity College Dublin at Grange Road.

Varsity kicks off. Women's rugby union captain Kate Marks on the team's "quiet confidence" 31



Queens' 4

Downing 1

Women's Cuppers clinches decisive Queens' victory

William Ross
Sport Editor

On paper, the second-round Cuppers tie between Queens' and Downing promised to be a closely-contested affair: both teams sit in Division Two of the Cambridge University Women Association Football League, where only three points separate the two sides.

From the start, however, it was clear that the Downing side, perhaps weakened by the absence of regular captain Freya Robson, would struggle to cope with the Queens' free-flowing passing game, a style which allowed them to dictate possession and carve out chances



Could you be a match for Varsity? Email our sport team at sport@varsity.co.uk to get involved

seemingly at will.

It is testament, therefore, to the Downing side's defensive tenacity and resilience that they managed to prevent Queens' from running riot in what was a very challenging opening half hour for the Downing side, keeping Queens' at bay until five minutes before half-time. The deadlock was finally broken, when a driving run from a Queens' midfielder drew a foul inside the box, leaving the referee with little choice but to award a penalty, which was confidently dispatched by Katie Woods. Minutes later, left-winger Rosie Mellor's superb curling effort into the top right-hand corner from the edge of the box ensured that Queens' headed into the interval with a two-goal

cushion, a fair reflection of their first-half domination.

In spite of an impassioned half-time team-talk from a Downing supporter on the touchline, the second-half brought more of the same, with Queens' continuing to dominate possession, while their well-organised defensive work meant that Downing struggled to create any clear-cut chances. Again, it seemed only a matter of time before Queens' would score and put the game to bed.

And so it turned out: within the first five minutes of the second half, Mellor capitalised on an errant defensive pass to fire in from close range before capping off a fine individual display by completing her hat-trick with a precise effort

▲ **Queens' found themselves on the front foot from the first whistle** (NICHOLAS FOONG)

from 25 yards out which trickled into the bottom right corner. To their credit, however, Downing were rewarded for their resolve and effort throughout the game with a late consolation goal scored with the last kick of the game: Queens' first defensive lapse of the game meant that Molly Becker was left free at the back-post, who tucked home a smart finish.

Downing, then, can be proud of their efforts in fighting to the end against an impressively talented Queens' side, who reached the Cuppers Final in Lent 2017. Queens', meanwhile, march on into the Quarter-Final's, with their hopes of recreating their heroic cup-run of the 2016/17 season very much alive.

New to a Blue: Finding your way with the University Orienteering Club

CUOC Captain Fiona Bunn talks to **Marcus McCabe**

Cambridge University Orienteering Club has been running, map in hand, since 1970, making it 48 years old. And in recent years it has gone from strength to strength, awarded "University Club of the Year" by the British Orienteering Federation in 2017. But, *Varsity* asks CUOC Women's captain Fiona Bunn, what exactly is it?

"Orienteering is a running-based sport often described as 'cross-country with a map'. Races are usually in a time-trial format, and athletes must complete the course on their map in the fastest possible time by visiting the checkpoints in

order, navigating the best route between each. Electronic timing chips register as you pass each checkpoint, and special detailed maps are used (normally at a 1:10000 scale). The terrain can be extremely varied; from forest to open moorland, mountains to complex sand dunes."

Originating in Sweden towards the end of the 19th century, Bunn explains that initially the sport "was used as a military training exercise, covering ground with a map and compass. The first race open to civilians occurred in 1897 in Norway, and Orienteering remains extremely popular in the Scandinavian countries now, being taught in most schools."

Navigating around glittering Scandi-

navian Fjords, perhaps under the dancing lights of Aurora Borealis, doesn't sound half bad to us and Fiona also agreed that a major perk of the sport is the way in which it immerses runners in the great British outdoors: "I particularly enjoy orienteering because it gives me the opportunity to visit new areas and run through different terrain, so the challenges are constantly changing." For example, last year the Varsity match was held in the Peak District where the women triumphed and the men suffered a narrow defeat.

Bunn continues, "it really is a run with a difference, providing both a physical and mental challenge. I'm motivated, like many others, by the aim of having a perfect run: there is always something that

I could do better and improve on which keeps me coming back for more!"

Because Orienteering consists of both physical and mental components, unsurprisingly training involves both physical and mental practice sessions. There are "two key parts: physical and technical training, both of which are provided weekly in Cambridge. Physical training is all about improving speed and endurance, and is similar to a normal cross country runners regime, although athletes may focus more on ability to cross any type of terrain rather than remaining on the tracks all the time.

"Technical training aims to improve navigational skills such as compass work, map memory, route choice and so on and this is the focus of our Wednesday

evening training nights. You can even do 'armchair training' from the comfort of your home by studying maps and old courses."

For the Cambridge Club, this hard work of both mind and body has been paying dividends.

"This year the team came second in BUCS, beating Oxford on their home terrain" and, just as impressively, "two athletes competed for GB in the Junior World Championships in Hungary (U20 team) and one competed for Ireland in the World University Championships in Finland."

So, if you want to avoid getting lost ever again, getting fit and out into the countryside in the process, it's time to get out that map.