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VARSITY

Director of Cambridge Zero to appear at Science Museum event despite fossil fuel ties

William Hunter
Investigations Editor
Sophie Sleeman
Investigations Correspondent

Dr Emily Shuckburgh, Director of University climate change initiative Cambridge Zero, will speak at an event on climate change at the Science Museum on March 31st, despite a decision by environmental activist and writer George Monbiot to pull out. Monbiot criticised the Museum for its continuing sponsorship by fossil fuel companies BP and Equinor. Following Monbiot's decision, comedian Robin Ince and environmentalist Mark Lynas have also stepped down from Science Museum events.

Cambridge Zero Carbon Society have followed Extinction Rebellion Cambridge in calling for Dr Shuckburgh to step down from the panel. A spokesperson told *Varsity*: "Fossil fuel companies align themselves with respected institutions like the Science Museum in order to gain social capital, and be seen as respectable businesses, rather than part of a dangerous, toxic industry".

Zero Carbon emphasised to *Varsity* that Dr Shuckburgh's decision to remain on the panel is related to the ongoing campaign for the University to cut its ties with the fossil fuel industry. A report from Zero Carbon in 2019 claimed that the University was promoting and supporting the industry, for instance by awarding academics with BP Chemistry professorships and Shell Chemical Engineering professorships. The University committed to full divestment by 2030

last October.

In 2019, Dr Shuckburgh's appointment to Cambridge Zero was called into question as she was accused of having ties with oil exploration firm Schlumberger in 2013, although the *Guardian* subsequently withdrew "unfair implications about [Dr Shuckburgh's] interactions with the fossil fuel industry" and apologised. However, it did become apparent that Dr Shuckburgh had previously appeared multiple times to speak at BP affiliated events, giving climate science talks to masters students at the University's BP institute in 2012, 2015 and 2018. This led many climate activists to accuse the Cambridge Zero program of 'greenwashing' for the University's fossil fuel investors.

Greenwashing is a term used to describe business practices that make a company or institution seem more environmentally friendly than they actually are, and while sometimes unintentional is more often a deliberate PR strategy.

The Science Museum Group (SMG) has been widely criticised for its receipt of sponsorships from fossil fuel companies. In 2018, 48 leading scientists signed a complaint compiled by campaign group Culture Unstained outlining how the SMG has breached its ethics policy by accepting sponsorships from Shell, Equinor, and BP. These sponsorships include the STEM Training Academy, sponsored by BP, and Wonderlab: The Equinor Gallery. An investigation by the *Guardian* found that Shell used their sponsorship of the

Full story on page 2 ►



▲ Protests were staged by Cambridge Zero Carbon in response to the University's announcement of the Cambridge Zero initiative (CAMBRIDGE ZERO CARBON)

Centre for Cities report warns of post-Covid risks for Cambridge's economy

Diana Stoyanova
Deputy News Editor

The Centre for Cities think tank published a report this Tuesday (09/03) warning the government not to overlook the risk that Covid-19 could pose for Cambridge's long-term prosperity.

The report investigates the development between 2015 and 2018 of, as well as the potential risks caused by Covid for, the UK's Fast Growth Cities (FGCs), comprising Cambridge, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Norwich, Peterborough and Swindon.

The 'Fast Growth Cities - 2021 and beyond' report includes findings in six key areas: labour markets and skills & education; businesses and growth; high streets and city centres; housing and planning; transport; and the economic impact of the pandemic.

According to the report, before the pandemic Cambridge was one of the fastest growing local economies. With 60% of its workers coming from outside of the city, Cambridge has been an important source of employment and research.

However, 3.9% of eligible adults in the city are currently claiming employment-related benefits, which is an increase of 2.3 percentage points in comparison to March last year. Additionally, 12.6% of

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EDITORIAL

The value of listening cannot be overstated

The sun has finally started shining, the term is ramping down and, as *Varsity* confirmed with Graham Virgo last week, an Easter term in Cambridge is on the horizon. Spring has never felt so welcome. Yesterday, even more heartening news arrived: for the first time a London state school has received more Oxbridge offers than Eton College.

Cambridge's increased awareness of access is certainly positive. However, we need to be conscious of the realities of access. We still need to be listening to those with concern about the foundation year (pg.10) and those who demand representation and recognition by the institution (pg.11).

This week also marked International Women's Day - the one day of the year, it seems, we are 'allowed' to discuss women's issues. Of course, female encapsulates a broad range of individuals, with one's ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexuality and socio-economic background altering experiences of sexism. It would be naive to think that Cambridge is immune from sexism. Ask most Cambridge females and they will be able to recite a memory of feeling unsafe, threatened or uncomfortable simply as a consequence of their gender. Certainly, news and social media this week has been rife with shock that 97% of women have been sexually harassed.

The crucial question is: why is anyone shocked? If we had been listening to women for years, rather than dismissing issues as 'not that bad', this statistic would not be a surprise. It is a privilege to be able to turn a blind eye to these manifestations of inequality, whether it be gender-based violence or poor reproductive rights - ignoring these problems is a luxury that we as women simply do not have.

From our first edition, we hoped that *Varsity* would provide a small form of solace this term. But, we have also hoped to maintain a space for voices and issues to be listened to. Thank you for sharing this space with us.

All our love,
Georgie and Gaby xx

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Cambridge University attempts to navigate new era of China relations

Christopher Dorrell
Associate Editor

A *Telegraph* article published earlier this month developed claims made in a controversial CIVITAS report, published last month, that the University had hosted at least three researchers from the Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics (CAEP) since 2014, including one scholar from the CAEP on “shock wave and detonation physics.”

According to research by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute: “CAEP’s four main tasks are to develop nuclear weapons; research microwaves and lasers for nuclear fusion ignition and directed-energy weapons; study technologies related to conventional weapons; and deepen military-civil fusion.”

In addition to this, the article from the *Telegraph* said that Professor Simon Redfern, formerly head of the Earth Science department at Cambridge, took up a role as a visiting professor “at a subsidiary” of the CAEP, the Center for High Pressure Science and Technology Advanced Research (HPSTAR).

According to the *Telegraph* this was founded in 2012 and is used to target foreign talent.

HPSTAR, like its parent institution CAEP, is named on a US sanctions list because of the risk of its research aiding the Chinese military.

Professor Redfern told *Varsity* that “HPSTAR’s Director is Dr Dave Mao, who was raised in Taiwan and spent most of his career as Senior Staff Scientist at the Carnegie Institution of Washington, USA (the ‘geophysical lab’).

He is a Foreign Fellow of the (UK) Royal Society and a Member of the United States Academy of Sciences - he is a world-leader in high-pressure research and has received many accolades for his work, and it was this that attracted me to work with him and his colleagues at HPSTAR.”

“A key precaution is that HPSTAR must avoid all classified and proprietary research and everything they have done is open and publishable. Indeed, if you read any of the papers that resulted from my collaboration with people there you will see that there is absolutely no military or dual-use related research. All my work has, or is being, published in the

open literature.”

Questions have also been raised by *The Times*, *The Spectator* and *The Daily Mail* over the University’s relationship with Tencent.

Tencent are a Chinese technology firm, one of the most valuable in the world with a market value of c.\$483bn as of 2018, whose developments include the messaging service WeChat.

In 2019 the University received a “generous gift” from Tencent for the funding of the Dowling Fellowship, a new five-year postgraduate engineering research fellowship. At the time of the Fellowship’s establishment, a Tencent representative said: “We are delighted to be partnering with Cambridge...[and] to be contributing to the development of this new research area.”

Tencent have been accused of having a very close relationship with the Chinese government. According to CIA sources, Tencent have previously received money and support from the Ministry of State Security, China’s main intelligence agency. Tencent strongly deny these accusations, refuting them as “entirely false.”

A spokesperson for the University told *Varsity* that they “have a robust system for reviewing strategic relationships and donations”, adding that the Committee on Benefactions, External and Legal Affairs (CBELA) scrutinises sources of funding “that might be inappropriate on ethical grounds.”

“Academic freedom is a fundamental principle of the University, and no donor directs research that they fund - this is core to our mission, and our integrity.”

Jesus College have been reported as having links to Tencent by *The Daily Mail* and *The Times*. *The Times* highlighted that the Yidan Prize for education, established by Chen Yidan co-founder of Tencent, has been hosted in Jesus for the last three years.

A Jesus spokesperon stressed: “In 2016, several years after stepping down as Tencent’s Chief Administration Officer, philanthropist Dr Charles Chen Yidan established the Yidan Prize...The College hosted the European leg of the Yidan Prize Conference Series between 2018-20; the Conference will be hosted by Oxford University in 2021. The prize has never been awarded to an academic or alumnus of Jesus College.”

“Academic freedom is a fundamental principle of the University, and no donor directs research that they fund - this is core to our mission, and our integrity”

The College emphasised that it “has a legal duty to promote freedom of speech” and highlighted that in 2016 they “adopted a policy statement where it reaffirmed its commitment to freedom of speech and expression.”

They continued: “we offer a platform where academic debates on a range of subjects are encouraged. It would, in our view, be a mistake to take conversations about China off the table.”

The examples raised in the *Telegraph* article, and in the CIVITAS report, demonstrate the difficulties universities like Cambridge face in adapting to the changing geopolitical situation.

Professor Redfern notes that his research at HPSTAR was conducted at a time when “the UK science community was being encouraged to build links with Chinese colleagues... this was the period when China was being courted by UK government to support the construction of a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point.”

He added that this was “also at a time when the UK government was still planning to use Huawei technology for the 5G network.”

A University spokesperson told *Varsity* that “since 2015, academics have responded to calls encouraging relations with Chinese counterparts and we would welcome greater support from government to navigate an evolving geopolitical landscape that seeks to balance trade relations with national security considerations.

All of the University’s research is subject to ethics governance and export control regulations.”

The desire for greater clarity in how universities should interact with China was echoed by Vice-Chancellors speaking anonymously in a *Financial Times* article.

Universities have required export controls for partnerships focusing on sensitive technologies but the toughening regime on China meant more applications involving China were being rejected.

“We do feel we’re working somewhat in the dark,” one Russell Group vice-chancellor told the *Financial Times*.

“There is a bit of a sense that we’re not entirely sure what’s changing, how it’s changing or why... we don’t really know what will be turned down.”

► Continued from front cover

Atmosphere gallery to raise concerns with the Museum about how one element of the gallery appeared to “create an opportunity for NGOs to talk about some of the issues that concern them around Shell’s operations.” This referred to a part of the exhibition featuring an interactive exhibition examining waste in the context of climate change.

This contrasts recent decisions by other institutions to end similar sponsorships. In 2020, London’s Southbank Centre chose not to renew its membership deals with Shell. A year earlier, the Royal Shakespeare Company ended its sponsorship deal with BP, citing activism on the part of young people as driving this decision. Monbiot wrote on Twitter that fossil fuel companies “use these deals to sustain their social licence to

“Fossil fuel companies align themselves with respected institutions like the Science Museum in order to [...] be seen as respectable businesses, rather than part of a dangerous, toxic industry”

operate.”

The influence of fossil fuel companies on the activities of the Science Museum extends beyond exhibitions. Culture Unstained obtained emails showing that Sir Ian Blatchford, Director of the SMG, organised two events in late 2019 and early 2020 offering BP the chance to defend its business activities and sponsorship of the museum.

In an email addressed to all of the SMG’s 1,300 member workforce, he argued: “Whilst the global economy remains carbon intensive, the energy companies conduct extensive research into a wide range of new technologies to reduce our dependence, including carbon capture, fuel efficiency and alternative energy... I am very sceptical about the trite argument that such sponsorships are greenwashing.”

However, slides from the planned

workshops between BP and the SMG reveal that BP plans to continue its production of oil and gas, and the company’s website reveals new extraction projects in the pipeline.

Despite increasing renewables production, BP still plans on allocating \$9 billion of its \$13 billion capital expenditures budget into oil and gas production. Last year, BP failed to disclose its carbon footprint.

Despite this, Blatchford argued: “The major energy companies have the capital, geography, people and logistics to be major players in finding solutions to the urgent global challenge of climate change and we are among the many organisations that regard a blanket approach of severing ties as being unproductive.”

Dr Shuckburgh and Cambridge Zero were contacted for comment.

University Council working group recommends reform to membership of the Regent House

Alexander Shtyrov
Deputy News Editor

The University Council's Governance Review Working Group has recommended a reform to the membership of the Regent House, making eligibility based on salary grade rather than job title.

The Regent House is a "legislative and deliberative body" representing University staff. It elects members of the Council, which is the University's executive body, and can vote on Council decisions.

The recommendations were made in a report published on 4th March.

The report notes that under the current rules "the logic of the membership has also been lost, with some classes of staff included but apparently related groups excluded".

A move to membership based on salary would also make more support staff eligible to participate in the Regent House.

In its report on the proposed reforms, the Council identifies Regent House members as "those who are most able to take an objective, long-term view on what is in the best interests of the University in serving its mission".

The report suggests that members should be able "to make disinterested decisions", and "appreciate the importance of teaching and research to the University's endeavours".

Membership of the Regent House has been changed several times since its establishment in 1926, most recently by removing an upper age limit for members in November 2020. The University of Oxford already operates grade-based criteria for its governing body, Congregation.

Under the current rules, membership of the Regent House is determined by position at the University. Fellows of colleges, those holding an 'established' position at the University, including Lecturers and Professors, and staff in some other roles, such as Research Associates and senior members of the Investment Office, are eligible.

The Governance Review Working Group has proposed to instead set a salary threshold for membership, with all staff earning more than the threshold being included in the Regent House roll.

The report gives two possible thresholds: Grade 9, currently starting at £41,526, and Grade 7, starting at £30,942. If the lower threshold is adopted, members in Grades 7 and 8

would have to work at the University for at least three years before becoming eligible.

Both thresholds would increase the proportion of support staff participating in University governance, from 18.5% on the current Regent House roll to 33.0% for the Grade 7 model, or 22.9% for the Grade 9 model.

However, the report notes that "both grade-based models result in a reduced proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) staff", which the Working Group considers "concerning".

While the lower threshold "would improve representation of women", the report suggests that the higher threshold has the advantage of "avoidance of overrepresentation of STEM disciplines" and "maintaining a strong voice [...] for academic staff".

The Grade 9 model would also decrease the number qualifying for membership of the Regent House by more than one thousand people, whereas a threshold at Grade 7 would have the opposite effect. However, no current members will lose their membership as a result of the new rules.

Freddie Poser, recently re-elected University Councillor, explained to Varsity his belief that "a form of grade-based model seems broadly reason-

able".

He added: "The University relies heavily on members of staff in roles that are both academic and non-academic and I feel it would be wrong to pursue a change that brings Regent House further out of step with the broader makeup of the University [...].

"Grade 9 and above are much older, more white and more male than both the University and G7+ [the Grade 7 model] and I hope that Regent House give this considerable attention when deciding."

The reforms are necessary because "academic-related staff are increasingly being recruited on an unestablished basis, leading to a decline in the number holding established positions", according to the report.

It continues: "There are numerous examples of individuals carrying out the same academic-related jobs side by side, one with the additional rights of an established office and the other without. There has also been a more modest, but still noteworthy, growth in unestablished academics, mainly those whose employment is funded by external research bodies."

A discussion of the recommendations will take place on 23rd March, with a voting timetable published at the start of Easter Term.

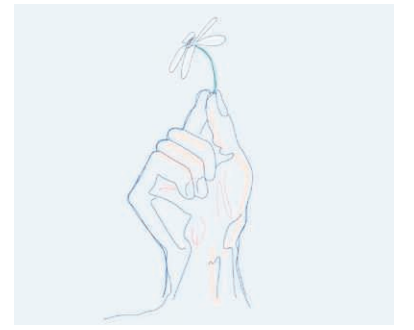
NEWS

University of Cambridge places 22nd in social mobility ranking

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What about the friendships that weren't forever?



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From a life behind bars to Cambridge University

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VIOLET

Who stole the Van of Death?



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Celebrate International Women's Day 2021 by scanning below:



Front cover illustration by Juliet Babinsky



▲ Oxford and Cambridge's high streets recovered more slowly after the first lockdown than others (LUCAS MADDALENA)

Continued from front cover

workers in Cambridge are being supported by the furlough scheme.

The report also shows that, among the FGCs, Norwich, Oxford and Cambridge saw slower recoveries of their high streets after the first lockdown due to their reliance on visitors from outside the city centres and non-permanent residents, such as students.

In a press release, Centre for Cities Executive Chief Andrew Carter acknowledged that "Cambridge has enjoyed several years of economic growth which has benefited people living in the city, and the whole UK through its growing contribution to the Treasury."

However, he warned that "it would be a mistake to think that [the city] has escaped the economic damage done

by Covid-19 and will need support to bounce back". Carter added that "in the short-term, practical measures to help Cambridge's businesses reopen will be necessary, but in the long-term, more substantive changes to skills and training are needed to protect people's jobs from economic crashes."

According to the report, the immediate focus of FGCs and the government should be on economic recovery. In the short-term, the report urges the government to provide guidance on how Cambridge firms can make the most of available financial support, such as business support loans on offer.

Longer-term government support for Cambridge's economic growth should focus on measures such as providing adults with better education opportunities, attracting high-skilled, high-paying

businesses into the city, and building more affordable homes. This last measure is especially urgent as the report points out that Cambridge is the third least affordable city in the UK in terms of housing.

A key challenge identified by the report are the limited powers of urban local governments in England despite the disproportionate contribution of cities to the broader economy. Thus, the Centre for Cities and FGCs also call on the government to divert more power and money away from Whitehall and to city councils. Benefits of this are already visible in Cambridge, where 900 sustainable homes will be delivered with the help of funding provided by the city's devolution deal with the government and additional council money.

According to a press release, the

Leader of Cambridge city council and his counterparts in other FGCs have welcomed the government's plans to move forward with plans for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, which aims to help coordinate infrastructure, environment and new developments in the area between Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

They have also called on the government to extend the planned East-West Rail project and the electricity line eastwards to Norwich, which would help meet ambitions for a zero-carbon future.

In light of the report's findings, Leader of Cambridge city council, Councillor Lewis Herbert said: "Sectors of employment that have been struggling like retail and hospitality are now working to recover after a year of on-and-off lockdown, and the hardship by so many local small businesses. Too many people have lost jobs locally and need a route back.

"The new analysis also underlines that growth and prosperity has not benefited the lives of everyone in Cambridge. As we look forward to recovering from the impacts of coronavirus, we are determined to make that recovery both inclusive and a big step towards a net zero Cambridge, so that everyone can benefit from a greener recovery."

Herbert also acknowledged that "the Centre for Cities report focus on greater investment in adult skills is vital so those now without a job and more local people can move into higher paid jobs."

He continued that "the city council is determined to use the report's conclusions to work with all our businesses, our two universities and all our local communities to build a better future for everyone who lives, works and studies here."

News

Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership announces new ultra-green HQ



▲ The Entopia Building is being retrofitted from a telephone exchange building constructed in the 1930s and is due to be completed in ten months (LUCAS MADDALENA)

Jolyn Koh
News Correspondent

The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) announced the commencement of building works for its new headquarters, which upon completion is claimed to be the world's first retrofitted office with ultra-low en-

ergy and carbon usage.

The Entopia Building, located on Regent Street in Cambridge, is being retrofitted from a telephone exchange building constructed in the 1930s and is due to be completed in ten months.

The retrofitting process itself is projected to lead to an 80% reduction in whole-life carbon emissions compared to typical refurbishments.

The new building follows sustainability benchmarks based on EnerPHit, a green standard for the retrofitting of existing buildings. The Entopia Building aims to boast a 75% reduction in heating demand compared to normal office buildings. Airtightness of the building will also be more than five times that which typical building standards require.

The project seeks to achieve these goals through several innovations. For instance, more than 350 LED lights from other building projects have been recycled and installed within the new building. Remaining furniture in the old building was donated rather than being disposed of. 21,600 kg of furniture were given to local communities, therefore preventing 21,000 kg of carbon dioxide emissions. Furthermore, one-third of the new building's exterior is painted with recycled paint donated by Dulux.

Through incorporation of these sustainable design considerations, the Entopia Building strives to achieve an Outstanding BREEAM certification, which assesses the sustainability of buildings, and a Gold WELL Building Standard, which assesses the impact on health and wellbeing.

The project will cost a total of £12.8 million, with Greentech company Envision Group donating £6 million dollars to

support the project, alongside a further £3 million grant from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Additionally, the University of Cambridge has contributed to the funding of this project, with an internal grant being awarded from CISL's Energy and Carbon Reduction Project.

The Entopia Building is the product of the close partnership between the University's Estates Division and several sustainable firms. For instance, the project has engaged Archetype, an architectural firm focusing on sustainable building designs. The new building will accommodate CISL's Cambridge-based staff, who have been working across five different buildings previously.

The Institute also hopes for better coordination of its international operations, such as between its global offices in Brussels and Cape Town with its new headquarters. Digital infrastructure, like state-of-the-art video conferencing facilities will also be installed to facilitate remote working and learning for members of the CISL and executives enrolled in the Institute's programmes.

An 'Accelerator and Sustainability Hub' will also be set up within the building, facilitating entrepreneurship through collaboration opportunities, as well as the exchange of knowledge of sustainability practices between aca-

demics and industry leaders.

This project is part of the wider sustainability push within the University. For example, the University's Environmental Sustainability Vision was introduced in 2015, with goals to reduce Scope 1, 2 and 3 carbon emissions and attain carbon-neutrality by 2050. In the recently published Environmental Sustainability Report for 2019-2020, the University also announced the adoption of Science-Based Targets (SBTs) to provide aegis for reducing carbon usage within the University's academic estates.

Dame Polly Courtice, Founder Director of CISL, stated that the Entopia Building project augments the Institute's "mission to support and inspire the leadership and innovation [required] to transition to a sustainable economy."

The Entopia Building also strives to be an "international exemplar for sustainable office retrofits". Lei Zhang, Founder and CEO of Envision Group, hoped that this project would inspire "others to be bolder in pursuing the goal of net zero".

Zhang also stressed the importance of leadership in spurring a "collective effort" towards sustainability, emphasising the importance of partnerships between international leaders across different sectors in creating a sustainable future.

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Rent Strike efforts renewed amidst ‘tone-deaf’ vacation rent policies

Amy Howell
Senior News Editor

Rent Strike Robinson and Rent Strike Peterhouse both released open letters yesterday (11/03), which demand that “those having to pay unexpected vacation residence should be fully reimbursed.”

The letters have collectively amassed over 100 signatures since their publication.

Members of the Rent Strike Campaign at Robinson and Peterhouse released the open letters after both colleges told students that those residing in college accommodation over the holiday will be charged in line with normal vacation accommodation fees.

At Robinson, an email to students emphasised, these fees are lower than term-time charges.

Among the campaigns’ demands are: a 30% rent reduction for the 2020/21 academic year; for the colleges to promote the option of remote study for international students; and a commitment to “no COVID-19 job losses.”

The letters reference that a “collective resistance has begun through the formation of Rent Strike Cambridge, where more than 500 students in over 20 colleges are pledging to withhold

their rent for Easter term,” after the formal University-wide campaign was launched in November.

Alongside this, the Peterhouse open letter criticises the University for “[putting] profit before students,” and cites the “massively reduced facilities” and “fewer communal spaces” at the College as evidence for “exorbitant rent.” Addressing the College’s returns policy, the letter states: “Peterhouse should also alleviate anxieties when students request permission to either leave or return to college by universalising the process, rather than relying on the arbitrary variation between tutors’ judgment.”

A member of the Peterhouse campaign told *Varsity* that the daily vacation charge is £16.50 per night. Robinson students will be charged full vacation rent of £18.95 per day over the Easter vacation, amounting to a total of £519 per student, according to emails seen by *Varsity*.

An email from Peterhouse’s Senior Tutor acknowledged that “a number of students [were] unhappy” about both staying in Cambridge and the requirement that they subsequently pay additional rent, and highlighted that students may be offered “limited” funds by the College’s Grants Committee at the end of the academic year.

A Peterhouse student told *Varsity* it was “disappointing” that the Google Form that has been used in previous years to apply for these grants has been taken down, and recalled talking to “panicked freshers” about the issue.

Meanwhile a member of the Robinson campaign told *Varsity* that the College “coupled this with a policy saying they would not police people returning home, essentially incentivising students to break the law.” An email to Robinson students earlier this month however stated that “the College will not be acting as a ‘policeman’ [...] and is not going to question your reasons for travel” over the vacation period.

Rent Strike Robinson consider the College’s response to be “completely tone deaf,” citing “the warden’s description of ‘tough and uncertain times’ [...] while Robinson continues to make the ‘times’ tougher.”

In response, Robinson College told *Varsity*: “The College strongly disputes the allegation that it has provided any form of incentive to break the law. The Warden’s message made it expressly clear that students were honour-bound to obey the law.”

The campaign also expressed concerns that students’ maintenance loans were not intended to cover living costs over vacation periods, and highlighted

that “students who rely on Easter term jobs for income are either not at home to continue those jobs, or can’t work due to the pandemic.”

Rent Strike Robinson ran a “mass email drive” on March 3rd last week, in which students aimed to have “a hundred emails sent to college management” with the result that “they’ll be forced to confront the student anger at their decision.”

In response to the email drive, which started at 3pm, an email was sent by the Domestic Bursar to students just after 4pm stating “we will respond to [the concerns] in due course” and that “it serves no purpose for individuals to add to [the original] message.” A further email was sent to students on March 5th clarifying the details of the rent policy and signposting support for students facing financial difficulties, including full details on accessing this support.

The email also addressed the reasons why the College is charging rent over this period, stating that “we are not in a position to offer accommodation free of charge or discount our rates,” for reasons including the fact that the College does “not have a limitless amount of hardship funding.” The College’s financial statements for the 2020-21 academic year note a total income decrease of 14.3%.

The email also highlights that the

College “liaised with other Colleges to clarify their policies on vacation rent over Easter,” which are said to be “similar” since the College was “not aware of any [other Colleges] offering Easter vacation accommodation for free to all undergraduates in residence.”

Since then, the government announced (05/03) that a travel exemption would be put in place for students over the Easter vacation, whereby students can travel home once between March 8th and April 29th “where it is necessary.”

Professor Graham Virgo, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education at the University, said in an email to students on Tuesday (09/03) that students should exercise caution when travelling abroad though as they “may not be able to return” and would subsequently need to “seek permission for remote study for the Easter Term.”

Despite this announcement, a member of Rent Strike Robinson told *Varsity* that “we’re going to continue campaigning on this issue, as we feel it is irresponsible to incentivise students to stay home when the government advice is to stay at university, and because we don’t want the disproportionately vulnerable students who returned for Lent to be forced out of Cambridge.”

Peterhouse was contacted by Varsity for comment.

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News

Six more modular homes provide ‘stepping-stone’ for homeless in Cambridge

Serge Isman
News Correspondent

Six new modular homes for the homeless have been built in north Cambridge as part of a project bringing together the charity Jimmy's Cambridge, the

Cambridge City Council, and Hill, a housebuilder.

The homes come fully furnished and equipped, and have running costs of under £5 a week.

These new homes follow a group of four modular homes completed in De-

cember 2020.

Hill funded and built both sets of homes, which were installed on land owned by the Council, while Jimmy's, which has been working with the homeless in Cambridge for over 25 years, is providing support to the new

residents.

One beneficiary of the project, who moved into one of the homes in December, said "I'm loving my new place, it's perfect for me and I'm enjoying having my own space. I feel lucky and am really grateful for this opportunity."

As of March 2019, Shelter, a national homelessness charity, estimated that 181 people in Cambridge were homeless, meaning that 1 in 695 people in the city sleeps rough.

Meanwhile, the Office for National Statistics estimates that 13 homeless people died in Cambridge between 2013-17, a rate of over twice the average for England and Wales.

Mark Allan, Chief Executive at Jimmy's Cambridge, believes that the homes "are a stepping-stone for people who have been sleeping rough to give them a real home."

He added that these homes are intended "to provide the support and renewed hope they [the homeless residents] need to overcome a very difficult period in their lives."

Allan explains that "one of the main challenges facing people who are homeless is finding affordable accommodation."

Alongside this, the provisions are said to be "backed up with the support to help [them] deal with the causes of what led them to sleeping rough on the streets in the first place."

"These projects", he believes, "offer both".

This partnership between Jimmy's, the Council and Hill follows an earlier initiative that brought together Jimmy's, the charity Allia, and the New Meaning Foundation, a social enterprise, and saw the completion of six modular homes in June 2020.

University of Cambridge academics at the Department of Land Economy and the Department of Social Anthropology studied this initiative and, in a report, commended the "comprehensive, on-site support services in substance abuse, benefits and long-term housing, health and medication, and life skills (e.g. cooking) to each resident individually and in groups" that Jimmy's provides.

Councillor Richard Johnson, Executive Councillor for Housing, stated that "the provision of these homes underlines the Council's commitment to providing a robust pathway out of homelessness as part of our broader strategy."

He added that "they provide a tangible opportunity for rough sleepers to move off the streets and build their lives again."

In January 2020, Cambridge City Council received almost £500,000 in a grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

This grant will be used to fund nine new paid roles and safeguard seven existing positions, some of which will be involved in the management of the new homes.

The Council provided emergency accommodation for 140 homeless people in March 2020, including in empty accommodation at King's College, and pledged to provide an extended outreach service, and physical and mental health support, from the onset of the second national lockdown in November 2020 until April 2021.

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University of Cambridge placed 22nd in social mobility ranking

Luke Hallam
Deputy News Editor
Matilda Head
News Correspondent

The University of Cambridge was placed 22nd in a recent ranking of forty English universities for its contribution to the social mobility of its graduates. The ranking, compiled by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), was assessed through the use of the English Social Mobility Index (SMI).

This position is worse than the University's rank calculated with data from 2017/18, which placed Cambridge 15th.

The universities in the top ten include a range of Russell Group and MillionPlus universities, such as the University of Bradford, which ranked at number one, as well as King's College London.

Cambridge's position in the rankings reflects a comparatively low percentage of students coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The report showed that only 16.8% of students came from the most deprived postcodes, as identified in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). In comparison, Queen Mary University of London was found to have 49.3% of students obtaining places from the IMD1 and

IMD2 postcodes.

A University spokesperson, responding to the rankings, told *Varsity*: "The University is pleased that we are increasingly attracting more applications from under-represented groups. Last year, using a combination of the lowest POLAR and IMD measures, we welcomed more than a quarter of our UK freshers from these backgrounds, a significant improvement on 5 years ago.

As well as assessing access statistics, the SMI considered average earnings after graduation, for which Cambridge placed 2nd in the table at £28,222, behind Imperial whose graduates were earning, on average, £33,117.

The English SMI is a new ranking system which assesses how universities contribute to the social mobility of their graduates. It only takes into consideration English universities, and English students at those universities, in order to use comparable data.

The declared aim of the English SMI is to address the issue that "the most advantaged students are 2.26 times more likely to enter higher education. For universities with the high entry tariffs, such as Cambridge, Oxford, and Bath, this increases to 4.7 times."

Furthermore, it aims to break what it

calls the "vicious circle" which emerges when ranking systems rely upon UCAS tariffs when making measurements.

Certain institutions which benefit from the prestige associated with more demanding UCAS tariffs see an increase in applications, and are therefore incentivised to increase tariffs even further. On average, learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds will achieve high UCAS tariff scores, so league tables actively rewarding these universities is "inherently detrimental to social mobility".

The report also criticises social mobility rankings which focus heavily on access statistics, such as how many students from a certain socio-economic or identity background are admitted. Such rankings "tell us little or nothing about universities' contributions to social mobility in terms of the added value they provide to their graduates", the report says.

By contrast, "it is not possible for an institution to perform highly in [the English SMI] while providing high levels of access but poor outcomes." The English SMI ranking combines rankings based on three areas: "access", "continuation", and "graduate salaries" to produce an overall score.

The "access" and "continuation" elements draw on data showing the demographic makeup of students entering higher education, as well as the numbers that progress from first to second year, and their final attainment.

The report uses data from the IMD to assess "the impact of higher education on deprivation" by showing the proportion of disadvantaged learners who "progress successfully" through the higher education system.

The final metric identifies how much graduates are earning after graduation, adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).

The report notes the differences between universities in the UK compared with the United States in terms of their contribution to social mobility. While in the US, top universities such as Harvard, all sit outside the top 1000 when using a similar social mobility ranking, in the English SMI Russell Group universities are represented at all levels of the ranking. The report suggests that this is partially due to the ability of American universities to set their own fees, thus the pool of applicants is, in some cases, limited by financial accessibility.

In the Cambridge Access and Participation Plan 2020-2025, the University ac-

knowledges that there is still work to be done, stating: "Our ultimate objectives are to admit a student body in which no identified priority group is under-represented, and to eliminate gaps between such groups in continuation, attainment and progression."

The statement continues: "There are many social, economic and educational factors which mean that the population from which the higher education sector draws is already unequal and which have limited and will continue to limit this ambition."

It further states that the University's goal is to have a third of its intake drawn from "the most under-represented and disadvantaged groups," which they define as the bottom quintiles of POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) and IMD measures of deprivation.

A University spokesperson further detailed to *Varsity*: "We're proud of our high retention rate, which, at 99%, is the highest in the country, and that this applies equally to the most under-represented groups; our graduates from those groups also go on to earn more than the average. It is these factors which mean that Cambridge is the top-ranked Russell Group institution in the index outside of London."

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Features

What about the friendships that weren't forever?



After being reminded of an old friend, Deputy Features Editor **Isabella Addo** reflects on the experience of friendship breakups

I was recently reminded of an old friend. A mutual acquaintance brought up the name of someone I hadn't thought about in quite a while, and despite the new friends and

▲ **"We often do not create the space to deal with friendships when they go wrong"** (OLIVIA LISLE)

"I've had the opportunity to experience life with another, and that is never a waste"

new experiences that I've had since the breakdown of our relationship, I was surprised at how unsettled I still was at hearing that person's name. It soon became clear to me that though the wound was old, I still felt it as sharply as I had in the past and I was left confused, wondering why my emotions were in such disarray. I then started to ponder on the concept of friendship in general and realised that we often do not create the space to deal with friendships when they go wrong. Rather, as I had done, we box up the emotions and ignore them – never fully giving ourselves the time to heal as we deserve.

I often find that romantic relationships are the main topic of conversation anywhere. Whether it's a Twitter thread about the politics of beauty preferences or the radio shoving love song after love song down our throats, it is quite obvious that as a society we are obsessed with hearing and talking about love.

This is quite natural and is by no means wrong, I've just noticed that romantic relationships seem to take precedence as a topic of conversation. As someone who has never felt the joy, or the shattering heartbreak of being in love, I have instead focused on growing my friendships and I am blessed to say that I have lived to see the healthy fruits of this intention.

However, this has not been the case for all of my friendships, but not from a lack of trying. Sometimes, you can give it your best shot until there is nothing left for you to offer or sacrifice and simply, sometimes distance or time may not be on your side.

Yet, it seems as though society is ill-equipped to deal with friendship breakups, despite its ease in obsessing over romantic relationships and how to handle them when those come to an end.

I think this is part of the reason why

I found the end of that friendship so difficult, and why I still do. All of the advice the internet or society gives about getting over a breakup seems useless when applied to friendships – eating a tub of cookie dough ice cream and watching a rom-com or taking a relaxing bubble bath seems pointless when your friend, who you thought you would have forever, has left such a massive hole in your life – a hole you never expected to have to fill. Perhaps I'm a pessimist, but with romantic relationships, I've often accepted that they can be futile as at some point, they could end. Whether that be from meeting new people or simply growing out of it, the prospect of an end in sight is always possible. But I never expected that my chosen family, the people I carefully picked to contribute to who I am and who I'm becoming, could ever leave or eternally drift away. This also isn't helped by phrases I grew up hearing like 'friends for life' or 'sisters before misters' – they all naively suggested to me that friendships were forever and that despite life's imminent difficulties, they would never completely end.

Despite it being about 2 years since the end of my friendship, I have recently decided that it was okay to still be healing from it, that there is no deadline or finish line. Unlike for romantic relationships there isn't an array of friendship breakup songs to queue up on Spotify or picture-perfect friendships in movies or television which I could aspire to have, so, I decided to create my own therapeutic plan with no expectations.

I've decided that it's okay to miss them, though it's been a few years, I've accepted the fact that I will always hold a special place for them in my life because at one time, they were my go-to for everything and they shaped a big part of who I am today. It's okay to mourn what we had and also what we will never have. I still think about the great experiences we shared, but I also lament over the upcoming phases of life which I won't get to participate in with them such as a wedding or a great job offer. It's also okay to still be mad or angry, I just won't allow it to consume me and I choose to love them from afar instead.

As I'm coming up to my 21st birthday, I realise that I still have a lot of life yet to live and that I unfortunately do not know everything. However, looking back on my measly 20 years, I've learnt a lot, and sometimes even cringe at the lessons I've experienced but at the same time, I recognise that they're only going to increase year on year. Yet, despite often squirming at some of my past experiences, there have been many revelations which I'm sure I will keep returning to for the rest of my life. One of them is that I've begun to acknowledge the complexity that comes with having meaningful friendships and relationships. Although I receive a lot of joy from them, sometimes they may not be built to last forever, but that doesn't mean that I've failed – rather, I've had the opportunity to experience life with another, and that is *never* a waste.

"Society is ill-equipped to deal with friendship breakups, despite its ease in obsessing over romantic relationships"

Not a third gender

Atalanta Sawdon Harkavy explores what it means to be non-binary



Non-binary is a term that barely existed in the public sphere a decade ago. It is an idea, however, which long predates the English language. There are Sumerian tablets, and Egyptian hieroglyphs, which refer to non-binary genders. Sadly, this means our language doesn't really have the capacity to describe the lived experience of being non-binary. I think this is a big part of the reason why so many people still misunderstand it. Still, I am forever an optimist – so I thought I would try anyway.

The clue really is in the name. To be non-binary means nothing more specific than to exist outside of the binary of 'male' and 'female'. Frequently the discussion around being non-binary assumes that it means being in between these two 'opposites'. Not quite one, or the other, but on the spectrum. This is really only a fraction of the truth. Being non-binary is existing anywhere that isn't entirely male or female. It is being outside of the spectrum, in a star, or a circle, or an octagon. If in defining non-binary you are constraining it, you have misunderstood its core, and arguably

only, element. There are no rules. Being non-binary is like being an atheist. You are defined by your absence of a religion, and for someone to ask you if you are more Jewish or more Muslim feels ridiculous, because you are equally neither of those things. Atheism is not some other religion, there is no collective faith in...anything. Some atheists don't eat pork, and do celebrate Christmas. The distinction is that they choose these things. There is no external force requiring it of them.

There is significance therefore in the fact that non-binary-ness is defined in the negative. There are very few unifying characteristics among all enbies. If being male has masculinity, and being female has femininity, being non-binary has queerness.

Truly all that queerness is, and has ever been, is a rejection of any kind of rule, or norm, or expectation of your gender and sexuality, and how you present those things.

Non-binary acts as an umbrella term, not a 'third gender'. There are those who identify with it specifically whilst many others identify with its rejection of a binary system of gender in their own nuanced way. Trans people are non-binary, but they may still see themselves

“To be non-binary means nothing more specific than to exist outside of the binary of 'male' and 'female'”

as belonging primarily to one of the 'traditional' groups.

Others identify as agender, meaning they reject the notion of having a gender at all. Some people's gender is 'lesbian', because for a long time this was the language which most clearly allowed them to reject femaleness.

Personally, I just like queer. I find it comfortably ambiguous, it reflects the fact that my own conception of my gender is far from stable, but makes it clear that whoever I am, I belong outside the spectrum.

For me, being non-binary means that I'd rather be called King than Queen, but ideally I'd be a Tsar. It means not preferring any set of pronouns over another. It is wearing skirts, and 'men's' suits but most commonly, dungarees. For me, being non-binary is freedom from gender. It is freedom to find joy in anything, and to live my life on my own terms.

In spite of this, it is also fear that I will never stop explaining myself. That I am cutting my future off at the knees. It is telling people my pronouns are she/her, because I don't mind them, and that way I don't have to give someone an intro to Judith Butler every time I send an email. It is setting up an online dating account, and selecting non-binary from the drop down menu, and then being forced straight back into the binary, and

“You could ask a thousand non-binary people to write this, and they would all produce something different”

asked whether I would like to be shown to people requesting men or women.

This dilemma is very much at the crux of the matter. People know they should support being non-binary, but they have no idea what it really is, so they fail in their allyship. Whether it's corporations trying to benefit from rainbow capitalism or Cambridge's own 'Girl Talk'. It's a wonderful magazine, but it is called girl talk. It defines itself in the feminine, and yet advertises itself as being for and by women and non-binary people. In doing this, it basically says we see 'non-binary' as 'woman-lite'.

I sympathise with the instinct to, in a patriarchal society, categorise all non-cis male identities as other, and therefore belonging together. But we are beyond Simone de Beauvoir, and if you want to create something for women, you don't need to tag on 'non-binary' just to be politically correct.

This is just my opinion. You could ask a thousand non-binary people to write this, and they would all produce something different. That is the joy of it.

If you find yourself identifying with some of this, then have a google. Go for a long walk, and a hot shower, and a deep think (there isn't anything else to do). If you think this might be you, then welcome, there's room for us all here. And remember, have fun with it.

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Opinion

The Cambridge Foundation Year: a sign of progress that must be handled carefully

Ruby Woolfe welcomes the announcement of a Cambridge foundation year but cautions that it must seek to widen access more successfully than previous schemes

For years, white working-class children have been effectively barred from elite institutions, including Oxbridge. Poor white teens in England's former industrial towns have been branded as "left behind", with white youngsters on free school meals or from disadvantaged areas the least likely group to attend university in general. These groups make up under five percent of students at half of England's universities, and they remain the least likely socio-economic group to be offered a place at Oxbridge.

Cambridge's announcement of the "foundation year" access programme is therefore long overdue. It mirrors the Lady Margaret Hall foundation scheme, a course first introduced in 2016 at Oxford. Students study a humanities-based multi-disciplinary course, which aims to combat the conspicuous lack of working-class students studying humanities subjects – many are encouraged by parents and schools to pursue vocational paths. The foundation year application process remains entirely independent from traditional undergraduate applications. Rather than being based on academic merit and potential, the foundation year focuses on "untapped potential."

Pledged to offer "the best possible

preparation for the rigours of a Cambridge degree", students will benefit from wider enrichment around their subject, able to immerse themselves in the sort of cultural capital accessible through a middle-class upbringing. The scheme has been chosen to pilot in the arts, but it is anticipated that, as the foundation year programme develops, STEM subjects could be added.

Access schemes and preliminary study years have been implemented before at the university. However the number of white working-class students at Cambridge remains pitiful, at 3%. This chronic lack of socio-economic diversity implies that current access schemes are often missing out on those most in need of their services. According to Oxford Professor of Geography Danny Dorling, this is a timeworn trend. "Everyone who is springboarded into an elite environment from a normal school feels like they are of below average wealth."

One subject-specific foundation course previously implemented is the four year Classics course. The preliminary year aimed to "widen access to the Classics world", in an effort to erode the traditional stereotype of studying Classics being almost exclusive to elite private schools. It aims to teach applicants

proficiency in Latin and Greek in three terms in order to join up with the main Classics tripos a year later. In 2019, 17% of students on the course came from the independent sector. Given that seven per cent of pupils nationally attend fee paying schools, the course was therefore accommodating almost three times the proportion of independent school pupils on a programme designed to target the state-educated.

The foundation year's eligibility process remains far more stringent than previous schemes. The extensive and varied weighting of criteria awards places to individuals who are judged to be suitable through individual circumstances, family income, and attending a low attaining school or college. It also prioritises applicants who have spent time in care, a clear step forward in access to Cambridge. A university spokesperson told me: "our eligibility model seeks to target educational disadvantage and is based on educational research into factors that can negatively impact student attainment. It is devised to ensure places are taken up by students who can benefit from the programme."

Such rigorous measures suggest the foundation year will provide support to those most truly isolated from Oxbridge.

In addition to the programme itself, coordinators are launching targeted outreach programmes, supported by third party organisations such as *InsideUniversity*, which aims to make application knowledge public. It's impossible for one academic institution to adequately bridge all social and economic disparities between applicants without government assistance, but the foundation year course is certainly a well meaning attempt to try and level the playing field.

Completing the programme will provide students with a recognised Certificate qualification from the University of Cambridge. With "suitable" attainment, foundation students can progress to degrees in the arts, humanities, and social sciences at Cambridge without the need to apply to the University again. The University also promises to provide support for attendees via the Cambridge Bursary Scheme, amongst others. Students will continue to benefit from the range of university support services and college-led pastoral care.

Despite such deep wells of support, the success of the programme hinges on the priorities of subject specialists. The University remains confident that the foundation year will enable students to meet the academic expectations of

the University and later thrive in such a demanding and competitive environment. However, it is highly unlikely that years of a middle-class upbringing can be made up for in a 24-week programme. Many University representatives feel that academic standards should not be compromised for the sake of access. Will the University be able to support students who are less academically prepared and less culturally at ease?

Robert Verkaik, author of *Posh Boys* and journalist, agrees: "reading a degree at one of the grand colleges of Oxbridge, steeped in hundreds of years of tradition and learning, can be culturally very unsettling". Those who manage to complete the foundation year and move on to an undergraduate degree can still end up having a miserable experience, unable to take advantage of what should be a life-changing opportunity.

With feelings of discomfort and being overworked the norm, the privilege of a Cambridge education is often seen as being able to push an individual as far as one's abilities may allow them. While the foundation year is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, only time will tell if Cambridge has a suitable understanding of class barriers for the four-year scheme to truly flourish.

The UK's drug policy is unjust and outdated. It's time for a review

Sorcha Khan argues that the UK must stop treating drug use as a disease and instead should follow the example of other countries by providing greater support for individuals and communities

This February, Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer ruled out a liberalisation of drug laws, citing the "criminality" that sits behind drugs, and the "huge issues" this causes to vulnerable people. This view is generally accepted; most people you asked would tell you there is an inherent danger associated with most illicit drugs. However, if you were to plot a graph of the harm of drugs, including legal ones, against their class in this country, there would be no correlation. In 2010/11 8,000 people died from alcohol related diseases, 1,000 died from opiates.

Our drug laws are unjust. Increasingly it is being argued that illicit drugs, rather than being inherently harmful, are safe in moderation necessitating us to rethink our drug laws.

Much of our understanding of the harmful nature of illicit drugs comes from research carried out in the 1950s and 1960s. Rats were surgically connected to self-injection apparatus, put into isolated cages and taught how to self-administer the drugs. Researchers watched as the rats chose drug injections over food and water, ultimately

killing themselves through neglect. Thus, the researchers inferred that if drugs were so freely available to people, mass-addiction and a resulting social crisis would be the certain result. Here we find the justifications for our current attitude to drugs.

However, these justifications are deeply flawed. Lab rats are by nature curious and social, so the isolation of the experiment must have been similar to torture for them. Arguably, most rats, or people, would turn to drugs if locked alone in a cage with no other choice. Due to this, in 1977 a team of researchers decided to challenge the findings of these previous studies. The researchers divided the rats: one set in isolated metal cages, the other in a large, hospitable "Rat Park" with plenty of other rats. Their experiments, using morphine as the drug, indicated three main threads.

First, that coaxing in terms of forced isolation and sugar were essential in making the rats want to take drugs. Importantly, levels of consumption in Rat Park remained below those of the caged rats. Second, it was evident that when given the choice to live a 'normal' life with comfortable housing and so-

cialisation, the rats had little interest in drugs. Finally, physical, mental and social factors were more important in influencing the rats' drug habits than chemical addiction. Is it not clear that our incessant criminalisation of drugs is both flawed and outdated?

What the Rat Park experiment seems to show is that the criminalisation of drugs is not supported by evidence of increased harm. The UK's drugs policy is therefore clearly unfounded and unfair. It is true, as Starmer says, that the criminality often involved with drugs does seem to hit the most vulnerable the hardest.

The best way to help vulnerable people would be to offer them social support. Carl Hart, regular heroin user of five years, parent and professor at Columbia University argues that he is "better for [his] drug use." Hart is a living example of the Rat Park findings. The way he came to his realisation further supports the Rat Park conclusions; after visiting his white friends in more affluent neighbourhoods and witnessing them taking the same drugs he believed destroyed communities, Hart realised that it was not drugs, but the context in which they were tak-

en, that mattered. There is no evidence to say that good quality cannabis causes schizophrenia or psychotic disorder, and Hart states that in the lab at Columbia where thousands of doses of cocaine are given every year, they never have anything like a heart attack. It is essential that we ask ourselves whether maybe, the criminalisation of drugs, alongside poverty, is doing the harm.

Although the question of how to proceed seems complex, there are examples across the world of effective, progressive drug policies that the UK could emulate. In 2001, Portugal decriminalised the possession and consumption of all illicit substances, and instead of arrest, users were offered support. This saw drops in problematic drug use, and hepatitis and HIV infections plummeted, with HIV infections dropping by 101.8 new cases per million between 2000 and 2015. Many in Portugal are still pushing for legalisation, making the pertinent point that decriminalisation decreases control - if all drugs were legalised, they could be subjected to the same safety standards as medications, food, and drink.

In 1994, Switzerland introduced policies that facilitated heroin-assisted treat-

ment. Not only has the number of new heroin users in Switzerland declined, but, as in Portugal, HIV infections have dropped, while drug overdose deaths also decreased by 64 per cent. It is clear that reform is actively saving lives. Denmark and France have also opened drug consumption facilities. And yet, the UK remains stuck in the past, with the leader of a progressive party seemingly incapable of calling for change.

Drug policy is carried by a flawed ideology. If we can see evidence that illicit drugs are not inherently harmful, that other countries are implementing liberal drug legislation that works, we have to be introspective in wondering why, as a country, we are immovable. Politicians look to a crusade against drugs as proving their morality, whilst refusing to support those vulnerable communities they claim to be protecting, and in fact endangering them through over-policing and prosecution. To put it frankly, a way of removing the criminality surrounding drugs, would be to *remove the criminality surrounding drugs*. The way forward, as consistently exemplified, is support for communities and users rather than policing and vilification.

The secret minority: Why care leavers at Cambridge deserve better

Christine Fowler



“I feel like a child crying for attention, when all I really needed was an easily accessible community and representation”

Why should we be left distraught, begging to receive help and support from an institution that has a duty of care to its students?

My deepest concern is for others in similar situations who feel unable to reach out, to lay out their vulnerabilities to people they have never met. One wonders how many people are suffering unnecessary mental and emotional pain due to the ignorance of others. It is this ignorance that has caused us to become, and remain, Cambridge's secret minority.

No one has a magic wand to make our lives perfect – but that is not what we are asking for. We want a voice. Representation at university and college levels would provide care-experienced, estranged students with a community in which to share our worries and concerns with others who understand. It would provide a space to raise awareness and defy stereotypes, and give us the voice that we have been denied our whole lives.

The university has the facilities and the ability to provide this. It is time for us to be represented and recognised as equal, no longer the secret minority. We are worthy of support; we are worthy of a community. This is what we were promised, and it is what must be delivered.

The University of Cambridge is the rich old man of the applicant dating pool when it comes to finalising UCAS decisions. Cambridge, like any good sugar daddy, promises financial support, opportunities, and a supportive, welcoming environment. Like any young person new to the dating scene, I found it impossible not to fall for the sweet whisperings of empty promises.

For many students, the realisation that these promises are not wholly true is as simple as forgetting about the creepy stranger in their message requests. Yet, for people like me who are care-experienced or estranged from their families, that promise *needs* to be true. Unfortunately, it seems the dream I was promised died when I entered a full-time relationship with the university, leaving me without support.

The university offers great bursaries, but there seems to exist a common misconception that money solves everything. We are viewed as a charity case – an empty bank that needs to be filled – instead of successful individuals that the university should be proud to represent.

During my first term, I received several emails – and saw many a post on social media – inviting individuals who were part of minorities to group chats, online socials, and talks to raise awareness within the university. Every time I received a new notification, I felt a tingling of excitement, hoping to see my community represented. I hoped to find a corner of Cambridge in which I could share my experiences and feelings with others who would understand the battles I face every day.

But all I found was disappointment – and frustration – that everyone else seemed to be considered and represented. On several outreach residential before I applied, the university had

promised support and a community. Yet all I feel is exclusion, and shame that a massive part of my identity has not been deemed an important enough minority. We must change this.

My first four weeks at university were difficult; I found it hard to become friends with people who had such different lives from mine. After years of being independent and content with being more or less on my own, several emotions hit me now I was constantly surrounded by living embodiments of the loving parental relationships that I have been deprived of. This was not something I had ever had to manage in quite this way. I wanted to talk to others who understood, and who wouldn't make me feel guilty for being jealous or upset. But with no established community, I was left on my own.

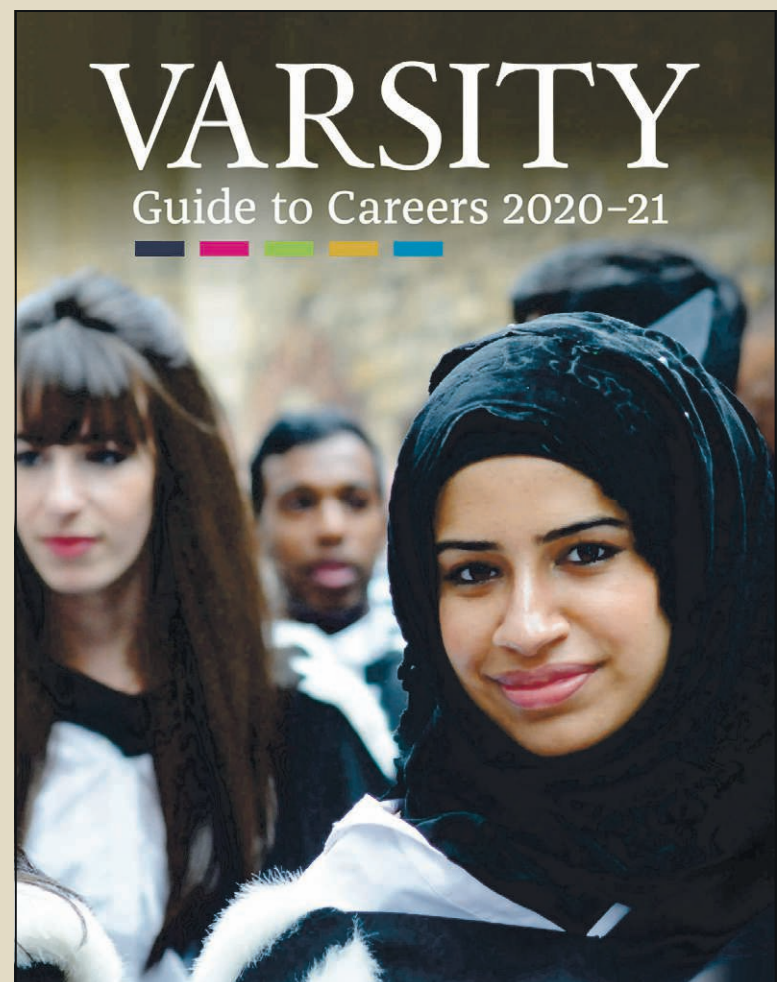
There is some help available. Luckily, I had the confidence to confide in my Director of Studies and to reach out to my college nurse, but it was an anxiety-ridden, embarrassing process of having to re-tell my trauma. I felt like a child crying for attention, when all I really needed was an easily accessible community and representation to avoid going through emotional turmoil when I should have been enjoying a new chapter in my life.

One night, I decided to submit a Camfess to try to find others in my situation. I was surprised by the amount of care-experienced and estranged students at the university, when I had felt like I was the only one. However, it was disheartening that, although there was the Class Act group on Facebook, there seemed to be no effort on the University's part to reach out to us or to represent us as a community. We are forced to find help, support, and a community by ourselves. That we are continuously expected to shoulder this burden ourselves is unjust.

▲ “It is this ignorance that allows us to become, and remain, Cambridge's secret minority (ODESSA CHITTY)

“We are viewed as charity cases, an empty money bank that needs to be filled”

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Interviews

From a life behind bars to Cambridge University

Christian Austin speaks with **Olivia Millard** about his extraordinary life transitions: from prison, to music, and then all the way to Cambridge



▲ Christian discovered his love for music while in prison, which later transformed his life for the better. (CHRISTIAN AUSTIN)

Content Note: Brief mention of child-abuse, violence and drug-use

Having spent a total of 10 years in prison, Christian Austin became well-acquainted with the prison officer saying “See you next week!” every time he finished a sentence and left jail. But ultimately he managed to defy these expectations, not just by breaking out of a cycle of crime that had defined most of his life, but by starting at the University of Cambridge at the age of 55. As he tells me his remarkable story of going from “crazy, violent, drug-infested beginnings” to completing an undergraduate degree at Cardiff University – and then an MPhil in Criminology at Cambridge – it’s easy to see why he became a hit in Darwin College Bar (or DarBar, as he fondly remembers it). Each story he tells is characterised by his good humour, honesty and determination.

Christian was born in South West London, but grew up on a council estate in Hampshire following his parents’ divorce. He was raised by his single mother, but not before he had experienced significant physical abuse from his father, who was an alcoholic. With violence a recurring theme throughout his childhood, Christian developed an aggressive streak and this trait inevitably manifested itself in the playground, where he started to get into trouble. Several decades of run-ins with the law began at the age of 6, when he stole a bicycle whilst bunking off school. Between the ages of 12 and 15, Christian spent his time being put in, and subsequently escaping from, various care homes; he estimates having absconded 30 times over a period of 3 years. He laughs as he remembers his escapades, on one occasion making it all the way to the Isle of Wight, but his tone becomes more serious as he recalls passing one of the island’s jails: “we were looking at

“...in prison I just ended up meeting all the guys I knew from care homes, I stepped straight into a hierarchy and I already had a place there”

the prisons knowing that was where we were going, later on.”

From what Christian says, certain parallels emerged between the care homes and the prisons he encountered, not just in terms of the hierarchical environment, but also the individuals inside. As he describes his experiences of witnessing abuse within the care system, specifically the molesting of children by members of staff, Christian confesses that he was spared this abuse because of his status as the “tough guy.” He acknowledges the irony of being “very lucky” due to his violent nature, suggesting the contradictions at play. This becomes clear too as Christian describes his years in prison, beginning with a sentence at Borstal youth detention centre aged 15. He remarks “in prison I just ended up meeting all the guys I knew from care homes, I stepped straight into a hierarchy and I already had a place there.”

From Borstal, Christian began a 20-year period of going from one prison sentence to another. Feeling as though he had “all the time in the world,” while inside, he explains the choice that every prisoner is faced with: “You can either sit and stare at the wall every day, for months or years, ‘cos no one’s gonna make you do anything, but I just read. I read, and read, and read.” Beginning with counter-culture books “you know, skinhead culture, Hell’s Angels, etc.” he read everything he could and decided to educate himself, inspired by his mother, moving onto works by Dumas, Hardy and Solzhenitsyn. He covered all the subjects he had missed out on by not attending school, from History and Geography to English Literature and Philosophy.

I ask whether he was among a minority of prisoners who devoted as much time to reading, knowing that around 50% of prisoners in the UK have a literacy age of an 11-year-old (coinciding with the age when many children start to play truant). He expresses regret that

“The incarcerated are ‘not only prisoners within a brick wall, but within their own minds’”

so many of those incarcerated are “not only prisoners within a brick wall, but also within their own minds, because they don’t have the capacity to read or write.” It seems that reading while incarcerated is not only in a prisoner’s interests in terms of improving their future prospects by gaining an education, but also as a form of escapism from the monotony of prison life. For Christian, it was also about learning new skills, especially one that would change his life: music.

During his time in care he learnt “a few tunes” on a piano, but it was whilst he was serving time that he taught himself to read music from a book. Armed with this theoretical knowledge, he picked up a guitar three years later during a spell in Dartmoor Prison, and started to play. He smiles as he remembers “I wasn’t even able to finish my breakfast before playing a tune!” Music has since played a big part in Christian’s life – he plays the saxophone, the guitar and sings – and music in prisons would later become the subject of his dissertation whilst at Cardiff University.

Having left prison for what would be the last time, aged 35, Christian found himself at a crossroads, and with the futures of his children in mind, he decided to “sort [him]self out.” When leaving prison on previous occasions, he had encountered a “tsunami” of crime and drugs when returning back to his

scribes enduring a process which “breaks you down [...] until you’re a clean sheet of paper.” He credits the help he received there as a strong source of empowerment in helping him rebuild his life. Following redundancy from his job in construction as a result of the economic crisis of 2008, he decided to apply for university, and secured a place to study music at Cardiff. While researching for his dissertation, he came across an article by a Cambridge criminology professor that particularly resonated with him, and he got in touch with her. On her encouragement, he applied for a place at Cambridge.

I ask Christian whether he was open about his past as an ex-heroin addict and ex-convict once he arrived at Darwin, given the prejudices that these labels unfortunately elicit. He explains that he gradually started to tell people, and laughs as he remembers his “celebrity status”; people saw his past not as something to be ashamed of, but as a measure of his achievement. Christian maintains that his year spent studying at Cambridge was the best year of his life, and he enjoyed it so much that he stayed on an extra year working as a member of the Darwin catering staff.

Since leaving Cambridge, Christian has been busy: he has given a TED Talk, performed with his saxophone, lived in Georgia for a year, sold pizzas, started work as a construction foreman, and begun writing his memoir. At the end of the



home-town that made it difficult to desist from reoffending. This time, he decided to move to another city in order to avoid these temptations. He spent 9 months in a rehabilitation centre, and de-

day, he says, it’s about your own locus of control, whether you want to be the “architect of your own destiny or whether you’re content with being tossed about aimlessly like a cork on the waves.”

► Since leaving Cambridge, Christian has performed with his saxophone (CHRISTIAN AUSTIN)

Science

The Dasgupta Review: Should we put a price on nature?

Kate Howlett explores the relationship between economic growth and biodiversity loss

It's a sad truth that a tree is worth more money felled than it is alive. This predicament is at the heart of 21st-century conservation: how do you encourage the conservation of biodiversity when it makes more economic sense to convert that biodiversity into monetary assets?

It's not just trees that face this grim calculation. Pangolin scales are worth more when sold as a commodity than they are on a pangolin. The same is true for elephant tusks and rhino horns.

Whole ecosystems can be worth more money once cleared for plantations, cattle ranches or urban developments than they are as functioning biospheres. All kinds of biodiversity are facing the uncomfortable truth that, under our current system for assigning value, they have greater value to us dead than alive.

Our present economic framework places more value on biodiversity as a commodity than it does on biodiversity as a life-supporting system. The problem is with the way we assign economic value rather than a lack of actual worth provided by biodiversity.

Nature is a rich asset, supplying us with everything from medicines, timber and engineering solutions to water, food and air. The answer, then, must be to start assigning value to living, functioning biodiversity, such that it outweighs its value once converted. This wouldn't be fiddling the books; this would simply reflect the real contribution of nature to human society, which is underpinned by a functioning biosphere rather than external to it.

This is what a recently published review unequivocally sets out. The Dasgupta Review, commissioned by the UK Government in March 2019, explores the link between economic growth and biodiversity.

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Any inclusion of nature within an economic framework risks its destruction

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Led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, Emeritus Professor of Economics at Cambridge, it was published ahead of COP15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, an international biodiversity summit due to be held in May this year. It is ground-breaking in its transformational vision, but, as with anything that stands to make a genuine impact, it has divided opinions amongst conservationists.

The Dasgupta Review is global in



▲ “The hope is that framing nature in economic terms will illuminate ways in which we can redress the balance between supply and demand” (KERI MCINTYRE)

scope and sets out a new theoretical framework for the relationship between economics and biodiversity, with economic decision-makers as its target audience. It frames the loss of nature as part of a direct relationship with the global economy, setting out the association between demands on nature and supply.

In essence, it demonstrates how the former is outstripping the latter, something which has been allowed to continue unchecked in the name of economic growth because biodiversity hasn't been

factored into our calculations. The review places our economy firmly within the constraints of the biosphere by inserting biodiversity into the centre of the equation.

The hope is that framing nature in economic terms will illuminate ways in which we can redress the balance between supply and demand. The report acknowledges institutional failures, such as incentives for environmentally damaging practices and a lack of investment in conservation and restoration, as a key

reason for the ongoing depletion of nature. However, by framing the problem as an imbalance between finance that encourages sustainability and finance which encourages unsustainable use, the Dasgupta Review presents biodiversity loss as a solvable economic crisis, rather than a poetic, inevitable tragedy.

For many, the framework proposed by the review is deeply problematic. They argue that slotting nature into an economic system so tied up with its downfall cannot be part of the solution and

that monetising nature as an economic asset doesn't allow space for its intrinsic value, which is exactly what has led us to overlook and undervalue it for so long and at such cost.

There is also unease around the terminology used in the report: nature is termed an “asset”, we are “asset managers” and biodiversity is “portfolio diversification.” The report's authors would argue that this language is essential for effective communication with economic decision-makers.

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The review places our economy firmly within the constraints of the biosphere

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Another key problem, some argue, with placing nature's assets within any economic framework, however novel, is that, if something is found to have no economic benefit, it becomes impossible to argue for its conservation on a moral basis. Proponents of the review claim the monetisation of specific ecological benefits is exactly what the review sets out to avoid, instead creating a completely new framework with the entirety of the earth's biosphere at its heart. But, for many, any inclusion of nature within an economic framework risks its destruction.

That said, the review has been much anticipated, and it has been hailed by many as a game-changer. By presenting the problem to a target audience with whom a substantial proportion of the power lies, in their own language, many think the Dasgupta Review could be the start of a real economic shift that begins to put nature recovery and preservation at its centre; as a necessity for sustainable economic growth rather than as a counter to it.

The report turns the conventional economic system on its head: the economy is no longer external to the biosphere but embedded within it. Of course, many would say this has always been the case, and that conservationists simply haven't been able to persuade economists that this is so.

Now, as biodiversity losses are continuing to pick up pace and the impacts are starting to appear, economic arguments for biodiversity conservation are becoming unavoidable.

It remains to be seen just how much impact the Dasgupta Review will have, but no longer can anyone argue that the economic case for nature hasn't been made convincingly enough.

Is empathy uniquely human?

Non-human animals aren't just "mindless machines" - they can think and feel as we do, writes **Erin Tan**

All of us grew up with non-human animals, even if we were not conscious of it. *Charlotte's Web*, *Marley and Me*, and *Fantastic Mr Fox* are classics on any child's bookshelf with one thing in common: their portrayal of non-human animals as having powerful emotions that make them seem almost human.

As children, many of us start off believing that non-human animals are capable of such emotional depth. And yet as we grow up we begin to ignore that they are creatures with their own lives, personalities, and dignity, simply because we believe that we - as humans - are superior, distinguished by select characteristics.

With the belief in our so-called exceptionalism in hand, we justify all sorts of unnecessary cruelties towards non-human animals, such as the inhumane (but cheap) practice of factory farming. One pivotal characteristic is empathy, the ability to feel what someone else feels and be affected by that emotion.

Empathy is not uniquely human

Through much of scientific history, scientists have dismissed the notion that non-human animals can have emotions, let alone empathy. The behaviourist approach dominated - the idea that non-human animals displayed behaviours which were simply hard-wired, beneficial responses to stimuli in the environment.

However, this approach has been recently overwhelmed by the enormous amount of new evidence that non-human animals are *not* mere mindless machines. Dr Jane Goodall spent years observing chimpanzees in their natural habitat, watching them use tools to tease ants out of ant nests, or embrace and kiss to make up after a fight. Her work, and that of researchers like her, has shown us one thing: that to a chimp, an elephant, or a dog, life is as vibrant an experience as it is for a human.

It is also as full of feeling for fellow

animals, so it seems. Experiments on rats showed that they would willingly forgo food in order to save a fellow rat in distress. This indicates that non-human animals can feel each others' emotions, and that they can be compelled to show what, in humans, we would call compassion.



As Darwin said, between humans and non-human animals, the differences in our minds are those of degree, not of kind. Empathy is an evolutionarily beneficial trait that we inherited, not one that evolved separately. Its advantages are obvious if you consider one of its oldest forms: fear contagion. It's the reason why people swarmed supermarkets for tinned tomatoes the moment news of COVID-19's infectivity

“There are dangers an attitude of human exceptionalism poses to animal lives too”

started spreading. Evolutionarily, this makes perfect sense; if you, as an antelope in a herd, heard the alarm call for a lion and felt perfect calm descend over you as opposed to overwhelming panic, you wouldn't stay alive for very long.

As for more advanced forms of empathy, such as compassion, there's an adaptive basis there too. A parent has to be aware of the

needs of its offspring, to ensure the survival of the child and its genes. Secondly, animals who live in highly social and complex groups (like elephants and primates) must cooperate to maintain the survival and harmony of the pack.

However, there are still critics who argue that empathy in non-human animals is not consistently demonstrated, and therefore does not exist. They often cite examples of infanticide among male lions, or the mother-daughter chimp pair Passion and Pom, who cold-bloodedly cannibalised eight babies in succession. Where was animal empathy then?

It can indeed be a brutal world out there, in the savannah or tundra, or even the bins round the back of your house. But those incidents don't mean that non-human animals don't have the ability to empathise; rather, they may choose when and when *not* to utilise it.

Does that sound familiar? It should. Just as humans have the compassion to comfort a grieving stranger on the train, so too can we elbow our way mercilessly through the morning commuting crowd - or commit the ruthless genocide of people who look different from us.

Empathy and cruelty are two sides of the same coin. Just as we can choose how and when to act, so too may animals consciously make their choices.

What animal empathy means for us

A lack of empathy for non-human animals can be dangerous for humans. Studies found that cultivating attitudes of superiority towards non-human animals made human subjects

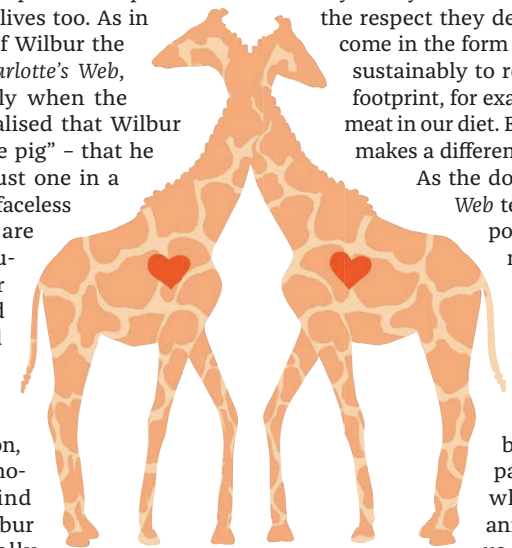
more likely to dehumanise minorities, proving that it's generally bad to adopt an attitude of superiority and entitlement towards living beings we're not familiar with.

But there are dangers an attitude of human exceptionalism poses to animal lives too. As in the case of Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte's Web*, it was only when the farmer realised that Wilbur was "some pig" - that he was not just one in a million of faceless pigs that are killed routinely for meat, and that he had a personality, the capacity for affection, and an emotional mind - that Wilbur was finally

saved from slaughter.

This tells us something about ourselves. When we come to realise the uncomfortable truth that non-human animals are not empty-headed automatons which we can freely exploit, we may finally be able to treat them with the respect they deserve. This might come in the form of shopping more sustainably to reduce our carbon footprint, for example, or reducing meat in our diet. Every small change makes a difference.

As the doctor in *Charlotte's Web* tells us, "It is quite possible that an animal has spoken civilly to me and that I didn't catch the remark because I wasn't paying attention". Perhaps it's time to be quiet and start paying attention to what non-human animals have to tell us.



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Omar, Assistant Brand Manager, Tampax



Alumnus of Emmanuel College

Zoe, Sales Manager, Febreze

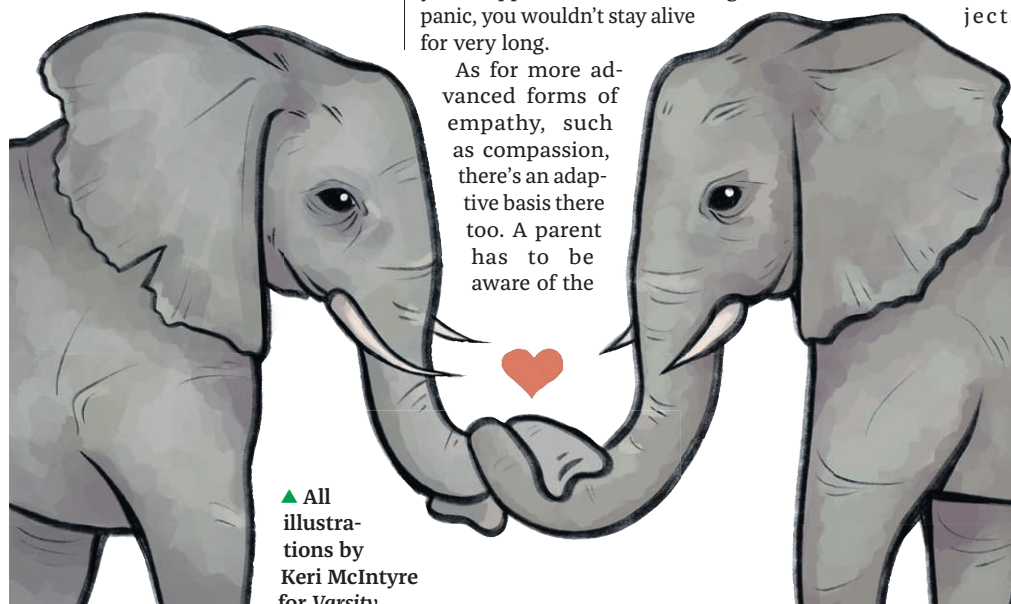


Alumnus of Robinson College

Rachel, Product Supply Start-Up Leader, Gillette and Old Spice



Alumnus of Pembroke College



▲ All illustrations by Keri McIntyre for Varsity

Vulture



ILLUSTRATION BY LOUISE KNIGHT

Lifestyle

Self care: emailing my future self

Tilly Palmer has an unusual coping mechanism for turbulent times: emailing her future self. But how, exactly, did this come about?



In the run up to June 21st, it seems as though the end of the unprecedented times is but a deep breath away. But the following four long months (along with the previous twelve) is still an inordinate amount of time. In a year characterised by loneliness, self-reflection, and sentimentality, reconnecting with familiar pastimes, banana bread, knitting and long walks became our raison d'être.

My coping mechanism for turbulent times came into fruition aged thirteen. While scrolling through a fittingly empty Gmail inbox, populated largely with old club penguin subscriptions and infrequent smiley-face adorned emails from friends, I came across a fool proof way of ensuring regular inbox pings. I giddily put 'email myself' into google. Thus began my self-care love affair with EmailFuture me.

Here's how it works; you compose an email to yourself, choose a date and time in the future and the email address you want it sending to. And, at the appointed future date, providing the email server still exists to do its job, you will receive a message from yourself written in the past. There are levels to membership that allow you to see what you've written but in its simplest format you have no access to the words once sent off.

Obviously, these obviously contain whatever you like, and inspiration can be found via the 'public but anonymous' page where other letters are published. Topics range from speculations about the future; will books still be in print? Have I been proposed to yet? What did I get in my A level results?'. Some are heart-

warming, sinister, tear-jerking and funny. If this strikes you as infantile and sad, read the published letters page for the sheer literature and intense

speculation over the stories and out-

comes of the emails being received.

The site was created in 2002, so there are people this year hearing themselves almost two decades ago in arguably the most change ridden period in history. The current upper limit is 2071. It presents a duality between micro and macro temporality of correspondence. My first

term of university I regularly checked in with myself almost week to week, making sure I had a motivational message on essay days and wondering if the friends made in freshers were still present.

In a period where there is an inevitability of loneliness, distance from home friends and family and an unavoidable lack of check-ins, building up this self-reliance was paramount to getting through the winter

months. The mood of hope conveyed from August to how my first term would end read like Hugh Grant's opening speech in Love Actually, 'Whenever I get

gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow Airport.' Whenever I get gloomy with the world, I check my

inbox.

During first lockdown these messages came in handy again; I would email to the next review, each time Boris updated us on the next three-week extension. Asking myself what I'd done, how I'd been doing, offering messages of support became a source of small triumphs and grounding. It was also an intense reminder that pre-pandemic, the style of these emails had been getting increasingly harsh. Sometimes a public letter will say something like 'you better have X amount of money by now' or 'did you get that promotion?' and you cringe internally as you think of the poor soul reading their emails as they sit at the desk of the same job and the same amount of money in the bank and no longer with the partner their past self-had been dying to know if they were still infatuated with.

There's been a recent TikTok trend where users have speculated about what they would feel like if their younger self woke up in their body now, peachy background music plays as they tell themselves 'yes we do now have a boyfriend, this is the house you own, yes you made it to university'.

Things that may seem trivial to everyday life, particularly in the last year when change has been so sparse can be so easily overlooked, and the desire for public appreciation of goals and achievements is not always fulfilled to the imagined extent. It therefore seems a much more productive lifestyle choice to consider the freedoms and achievements that have led up to this point from a self-congratulatory point of view.

A technique often used in cognitive behavioural therapy turns the nega-

tivity of self-monologues into an imagined conversation with your 'inner child': would you berate them the way you berate yourself? This is quite literally played out here. Physically typing harsh self-beratements and

“Offering messages of support became a source of small triumphs and grounding”

labels of belittlement is much harder to do than sounding those sentiments out in your head.

Particularly in times of isolation it's incredibly easy to get caught up and harder to edit and monitor these self-flagellating thoughts. A big part of having these growth mindsets is the ability to rephrase negative self-

talk to your child-self adapt it to something forgiving and encouraging.

Email futureme isn't the only site to offer this service. Others include The Self Club and Emailfuture.com and it seems to be gaining momentum with published letters often mentioning the pandemic, well-wishing for the future and signalling a self-dialogue that engenders a reflective and resilient shift from past into future.

A blast from the past just got a whole new meaning.

Books Are Dead

Dear FutureMe,

John Comar believes that books are never going to die in the printed form. I however believe that in 10years from today February 17th, 2011. Only 10% of all books in the world will be printed in paper format. Meaning 90% of all printed materials will be in a digital format.

Sent almost 10 years to the future from February 17th, 2011 to February 17th, 2021

Like! (36) | Inappropriate

A letter from February 19th, 2018

Dear FutureMe,

I am so proud of you!! You've made it!! You've probably made tons of friends by now and trust me there are more to come. I hope that you've made it to a great college with great majors that connect to the medical field. I understand that this is new but you'll get through all the obstacles. Always remember this lesson: How would you like to have this \$20 bill? *crumbles the bill* How about now? Do you still want the bill? *throws it down in the dirt and stomps on it, then picks it up* How about now? Do you still want this \$20 bill? Well, this is a valuable lesson I have taught you. No matter what I did to that dollar bill you still wanted it. Why? Because it never lost it's worth. Life may crumble you, stomp you into the dirt, chew you up and spit you out, but no matter what life does to you, you will never lose your worth. Always remember that. Keep up the good work. Hope you make it farther in life. If you've made it this far trust me you can make it farther. I know that you're at least 18 right now so, your an adult and your taking care of yourself. Continue to make the RIGHT decisions and do GOOD in this world. You can make a difference. Byeeee. Love the 16-year-old you. ;D

Sent almost 3 years to the future from February 19th, 2018 to February 19th, 2021

Like! (53) | Inappropriate

marriage

Dear FutureMe,

find Freddie and marry him .

Sent over 12 years to the future from July 22nd, 2008 to February 14th, 2021

Like! (190) | Inappropriate

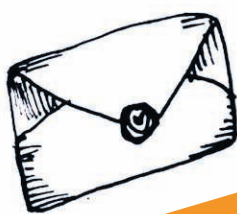
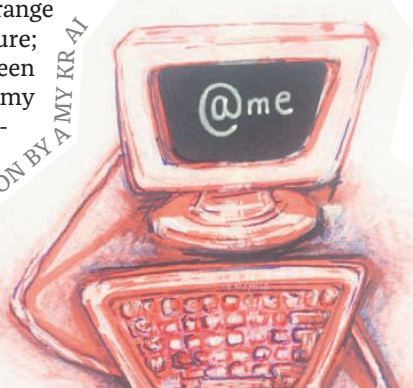


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Arts

Short stories for short attention spans

To overcome lockdown-driven exhaustion, **Lily Isaacs** recommends short story collections to help rediscover the enjoyment of reading, piece by piece



▲ ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY LOUISE KNIGHT

During the first lockdown, I had grand ambitions to conquer the titans of Russian literature. Two lockdowns later, I can barely get through a fifteen-second TikTok video without getting distracted. I miss the feeling of flipping through real books, and even more than that, I miss the feeling of actually wanting to read them – and though there's nothing quite like the self-importance of finishing off a capital B book, if you have neither the time nor the concentration for that, forget "reading for pleasure" and try some short spurts of reading for your ego.

Short stories give you something to slink away and contemplate, even if just for twenty minutes. Read them outside and gaze over their pages at your fellow humans, affirming your status as the neighbourhood intellectual; read them inside and bore your parents (or your tinder matches) with your newfound literary passion. These are some of my favourites:

Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) and *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) are jaw-dropping, spine-tinglingly collections documenting the lives of generations of Indian Immigrants in America. Lahiri became the youngest winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2000, and when you read her work, it's not difficult to see why – her stories strike you with profound objectivity and total intima-

cy, and in surprisingly few words, she builds impossible depth into her characters, getting you to fall in love with every new person she introduces. A few of Lahiri's stories are intri-

“
*Short stories give you
something to slink away
and contemplate, even if
just for twenty minutes*
”

cately connected, but most are just as good if read stand-alone. If you want to commit, though, try 'Once in a Lifetime,' 'Year's End,' or 'Going Ashore,' which follow the lives of two children growing up, breaking down, and falling in love.

David Sedaris

David Sedaris's *When you are Engulfed in Flames* (2008), *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* (2004), and *Me Talk Pretty*

One Day (2000) are the books that I have re-read the most in my life. Sedaris's wit is addictive, and reading his writing feels like shovelling down spoonfuls of ice cream; his humour is cold but deliciously comforting. He introduces you to the many eras of his life – his adolescence in small-town North Carolina, his time working as an Elf at a department store, quitting smoking, performance art, moving to France. Read them when you are sad, and feel a bit better.

J.D. Salinger

J.D. Salinger's *For Esme with Love and Squalor, and Other Stories* (1953) features two of his most famous stories – 'For Esme,' and 'A Perfect Day for a Bananafish' – and you can buy it with a lovely mint green cover that makes whatever is inside it worth your while. Aesthetics aside, my favourite story in the book is 'Teddy,' where Salinger writes the child-genius Theodore 'Teddy' McAr-dle, who is seeking spiritual enlightenment on a cruise ship. There's nothing quite like Salinger's characters; they roam the upper echelons of the American forties, lounge in white-porched houses, and they make you laugh – but there's always something lurking under the surface, something waiting to bite.

Alice Munro

Alice Munro's stories in *Runaway* (2003) are quite long, I grant you, but they are worth every word. It is difficult to synopsis Munro's stories because they feel like entire lives – like brushing past someone on the street and then, suddenly, being privy to their whole brain, to their anxieties, to their pain, to their joy. It's an unnerving experience. At the centre of the collection are three connected stories about a woman called Juliet, one dissecting her marriage, one about returning home to her parents, and one about her daughter, who has run away to join a cult. If you just want to dip your toe in Munro, read these three stories. They're unforgettable.

If you don't want to buy a book, you can have a scroll through the New Yorker fiction section. Look up your f a -



avourite writer, as there's a chance they're on there – all of the writers mentioned here are. If you want, try 'Heirlooms' by Bryan Washington to get you started – it's utterly beautiful, and if you are feeling especially lazy, the author's voice will read it out to you. Walk around with fiction in your ears instead of music, for a change.

Reading short stories is all about balance. Read one when you've given up on a lecture, read one with a glass of wine, read one with your favourite TV series playing in the background, I don't care. This is not about growing your brain, but about rewarding it – it's

about achieving the act of reading, if just a little. It's about getting out of your own life for half an hour, and into someone else's. Sometimes, that is everything.



Fashion

The Politics of Style

Fashion Editor *Lara Zand* unpicks our fascination with the way women in power dress

'Politics is hell in general,' Margaret Atwood tells Mary Beard in an interview for BBC Two's *Front Row Late*, 'but I think it's probably double hell for women because not only do you have to have a position, you have to have a hairstyle.'

It's not a stretch to say that fashion at the 2021 Inauguration attracted more fanfare than the average Met Gala. A grand-scale event involving high-profile individuals dressing up and coming together seems like a relic from a distant past, such that a handover of political power ended up catching not only the eyes of the public, but of fashion critics and connoisseurs far and wide. Spotlight on the wardrobe of Kamala Harris, in a majestic purple ensemble, continued, off the back of a campaign trail that saw her become a regular fixture in both Politics and Fashion sections:

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Dress nicely but not too nicely; wear makeup but not too much; be feminine but not too feminine

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'Kamala Harris is the modern beauty icon the world needs,' insists the *Telegraph*; 'Kamala Harris Will Change Power Dressing Forever,' declares *Vogue UK*. She's not the only one; last year Nancy Pelosi's masks and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Telfar bag quickly became internet sensations. These three women were generally lauded for adding an unapologetic personal touch to their work wardrobes. But when fully registering the way in which these politicians' clothes have become international topics of discussion, a Hillary Clinton tweet from 2019 comes to mind: 'Bottom line: a good pantsuit is important. But never more important than what a woman has to say.' So, as we attempt to look beyond the veneer of *Girlboss* celebration, perhaps we should be stopping to pose the age-old question: to what extent should female politicians' dress sense be an object of focus at all?

That female politicians have always experienced a tricky relationship with fashion is undeniable. This dates back to the very moment that 'female' could be understood in the definition of 'politician'. Official and unofficial dress-codes have existed (and continue to exist) since the day women were allowed to run for office. The early twentieth century welcomed the first female MP in Parliament and the first woman in Congress, yet wearing trousers was not accept-

able until as late as the 1990s. Attire should be dark and demure: not too feminine, nor too conservative. There was no sense then that 100 years later, a record number of women would be sworn into Congress, among them women wearing a traditional Pueblo dress, a thobe and a hijab.

But congratulating ourselves on the pace of change would be premature; we don't have to look further than the press treatment of a politician like Hillary Clinton over the course of her career to see that. Though Marie Claire may now hail her as 'the undisputed fashion icon of our generation', the self-proclaimed 'pantsuit aficionado' was ridiculed for decades for her bold colour choices and experimental silhouettes. In one piece (on the then presidential candidate), *Daily Mail* called a classically feminine dress 'frumpy', yet a more androgynous waistcoat with cargo pants was 'out of place', and a loose cardigan 'aged her and hid her figure'. If you're wondering exactly what they wanted from her, you're not alone. Even the adoption of her inoffensive signature pantsuit would not pacify critics. 'Why must she dress that way?' moaned *Project Runway*'s Tim Gunn in 2011: 'I think she's confused about her gender. All these big, baggy menswear pantsuits? No, I'm really serious.'

Vanessa Friedman of the *New York Times* has famously defended the decision to cover politicians' fashion, citing, for one, the many male politicians whose attire has also received attention. It's true that it's an increasingly common, though not nearly equal in measure, phenomenon; the layers of meaning behind Joe Biden's Ralph Lauren suit at his inauguration, for example, were carefully dissected. It's also worth noting that there's coverage of politicians' dress and there's coverage of politicians' dress.

There's a *New York Times* analysis on the significance of Kamala Harris' white suit as a symbol of women's suffrage, and there's the *Daily Mail*'s infamous 'Never mind Brexit, who won Legs-it!' front page featuring Theresa May and Nicola Sturgeon.

The scrutiny in the press can only be a reflection of scrutiny in the real-life work environment. Dress nicely but not too nicely; wear makeup but not too much; be feminine but not too feminine. A handful of moments that made headlines give us a telling insight into the day-to-day: former French minister Cecile Duflot being noisily catcalled in the French Parliament in 2012 (in a dress that later took

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What does this fixation say about us?

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on a life of its own as somewhat of a women's resistance symbol); the vitriol directed at Labour MP Tracy Brabin last year after her dress slipped off her shoulder in the House of Commons. 'I get constant comments on the clothes I wear,' Labour MP Jess Phillips told *Vogue UK* in 2019. 'People will send you policy emails, being like, "I actually think it's quite reasonable what you said about Brexit, but we couldn't concentrate because you could see a bit of your cleavage."' What does this fixation say about us? That we still can't take women seriously? That the only way we know how to talk

about them is image-based? That we can still only exclusive-ly



▲ *Daily Mail* front page from 2017 (TWITTER/DAILYMAILUK)

associate them with the front pages of fashion and beauty magazines and not political columns? Does a lack of appropriate vocabulary to speak about women in power suggest a discomfort with that very concept?

And so, whether she actively opts to express herself through fashion or not, a woman's dress choices will be subjected to scrutiny. But this surely tells us something we've always known about clothing: that it holds immense power. That it can send an unspoken message. That it can act as one more tool at the disposal of women in power. And recent years have seen an increasing number of women consciously harness this tool.

Politicians have time and again donned white, for example, to pay tribute to the women's suffrage movement - from Shirley Chisholm to Geraldine Ferarro to Kamala Harris. Democratic Congresswomen were all-black to the State of the Union in 2018 in solidarity with the #MeToo movement, whilst last year Michelle Obama let her viral 'Vote' necklace speak as loudly as the contents of her Democratic National Convention speech. There's no doubt that fashion is made an object of political fascination. But a generation of women in power are using it to their advantage, taking back control of something that was for so long used as a weapon to distance them from the very idea of their profession. Ocasio-Cortez encapsulates this outlook in her response to criticism she faced for appearing in a loaned designer dress: 'Sequins are a great accessory to universal healthcare, don't you agree?'

◀ Nancy Pelosi, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Kamala Harris have all had their fashion choices analysed (LARA ZAND FOR VARSITY)



Film & TV

Desperately Seeking Sasuke: or, Why Naruto is Actually Great

Film and Tv Editor **Ellie Etches** reflects on finally settling down to watch one of the most popular animes of all-time

If someone without much experience of watching anime tried to cobble together a vague idea of how one would appear, they might come close to *Naruto*. You could make a lethal drinking game out of the stock *shōnen* tropes this series utilises. A shot for every orphaned main character; one when someone's hair or breasts defy the laws of physics; another when an attack is loudly announced before being unleashed...You'd be under the table after one 20-minute episode.

The "Will of Fire" is Konoha's central tenet: it is the belief in the village as a family unit; that the hopes of the previous generation live on through the next, and is what drives ninja to protect what they hold dear. The sensei system is a clear manifestation of this: Naruto and his peers form three-man squads under the instruction of older *shinobi* who become parental figures. Might Guy (yes, that's really his name) is the superlative, who will so often proclaim his ardent appreciation for his protégées that it becomes a recurring gag, but each sensei expresses their pride in their juniors in their own way. Naruto's own mentor,

I'll pick up your pieces."

The familial likeness between father and son is such that one could be the mirror image of the other, if not for the elder's scarred face. It is easy to forget that even in the grittier, aged-up *Naruto: Shippuden*, these characters are still children. The stoic, battle-hardened figure of Shikamaru's father is a reflection of his own future.

While familial ties bind Konoha together, *Naruto* also explores what happens when these threads tangle, snag, and splinter. This is the crux of the arc of Naruto's best friend and rival, Sasuke. Throughout the series, Sasuke wears the emblem of his clan, wiped out in a mass slaughter

Naruto is so deeply affected by Sasuke's fall that it becomes his sole mission to pull him back from the precipice. Naruto never once loses hope in his friend's redemption: they are perfect foils, both orphaned and ostracised from a community that prioritises ancestral ties: Naruto shunned by the villagers for his terrifying power, Sasuke self-isolated by a crippling sense of duty. Most minor plotlines become phantom fulfilments of *Naruto's* ultimate goal. They follow the general pattern of Naruto finding an angsty, dark-haired teenager with a traumatic past and a terrifying power, and setting them on the path to good.

While wider political conflicts deepen, and the foes become all the more insurmountable, Sasuke's redemption remains at the epicenter, the agent for the development of Naruto's power: "I don't care who I have to fight..." he says, characteristically overzealous. "If he rips my arms off, I'll kick him to death. If he rips my legs off, I'll bite him to death..."

"Even if I'm torn to shreds... I will find a way to take Sasuke back!"

This is Naruto's own personal rendering of the Will of Fire. Naruto will seek Sasuke to the corners of the earth because of their time together as trainees; because of their unshakable bond. You'd struggle to find such a devoted depiction of male friendship in Western media (but that's a conversation for another article). Naruto's core message is a simple yet comforting one: a future with the people you love is worth fighting for.

"The 'Will of Fire' is Konoha's central tenet: it is the belief in the village as a family unit"

I was first introduced to *Naruto* in manga form as a teenager. I didn't know much about the series, but was attracted to the first volume, standing out from the shelves of my local comic book shop in hi-vis orange. Masashi Kishimoto's gorgeous cover art conjured so many questions. Who made this tiny, yellow-haired child so angry? Is the boilersuit-whiskers-combo plot relevant or has he dressed up as convict Bugs Bunny for Halloween?

The general storyline, I'd discover, follows Naruto Uzumaki and his classmates, ninja-in-training from the hidden village of *Konohagakure*. Naruto is infectiously enthusiastic and loveably inept. He'd be the worst ninja of all if he didn't have a trick up his sleeve, or, rather, a monstrous, folkloric fox spirit sealed inside his body.

Now the whiskers make sense.

The wider world of *Naruto* can be gloomy and war-torn, but the early installments favour Konoha's high-saturation rural idyll. A lot of the plot focuses on the hilarious antics that ensue when you endow school-age children with supernatural *ninjutsu*. The fact that *Naruto's* target demographic is pre-teen boys does sometimes come through in a bad way: compelling female characters are often severely underdeveloped, and a lot of the humour is crass and creepily sexual (one of *Naruto's* techniques is literally called the "*harems jutsu*"). But, for the most part, early *Naruto* gives us "boys being boys" in the purest sense: the franchise can touch upon serious themes without taking its characters or itself too seriously. Perhaps this is what inspired me, over the summer, to tackle the monumental task of watching all 720 episodes of the anime adaptation.

Over the course of this endeavor I've come to realize that to approach *Naruto* merely as indulgent escapism is to do it an injustice. I've had a stronger emotional response to it than more mature, gritty anime, and I believe it is down to the central philosophy that runs through the show, treated both with earnest and with nuance.

Kashi, is less overt, but the show will take every opportunity to squeeze in a poignant shot of the same group photo that graces the home of every member of Team 7.

The series rarely approaches grief head-on, but the constant reiteration of the ties that bind the villagers is utilised to maximum impact when the viewer is confronted with a character death. Each is affecting in its own way, but, for me, the death of sensei Asuma Sarutobi will always hit hardest, because of his relationship with his sharp-witted yet debilitatingly apathetic student, Shikamaru (my underrated personal favourite). Asuma introduced Shikamaru to *shogi*, the Japanese version of chess that proves the perfect tool to nurture this prodigious young tactician. When Asuma is killed in battle, the show cuts back to one of their matches, the smoke coiling languidly from his characteristic cigarette as he explains a recent revelation on Konoha's founding philosophy. In the allegory of the chessboard, the ninja are the knights; but the king-piece is not, as he used to believe, the village leader. Asuma fights, and dies, to protect the next generation.

A whole episode is devoted to Shikamaru coping with the loss, and this surprisingly sensitive portrayal of masculine emotion is one of the most affecting scenes I've witnessed in animation. Shikamaru and his father play a game of *shogi* in a striking visual parallel to his time spent with Asuma. The scene brims with quiet tension: the hum of insects, the flicker of candlelight, the "click" of the game pieces, and the elder Nara's emotionally stilted attempts at consoling his son... it all culminates in an explosive outburst, as Shikamaru's pent-up grief, rage and guilt finally erupts. His father leaves him to weep amidst the scattered tiles of the upended chess board: "Let out all your sadness, fears and anger, and everything else..."

► "The show will take every opportunity to squeeze in a poignant shot of the same group photo." (ILLUSTRATION BY ELLIE ETCHES)

enacted by his own brother. Sasuke's drive for revenge leads him to seek power at any cost, ultimately betraying the village to train under Naruto's answer to Lord Voldemort.

The most compelling villains are never evil for evil's sake, and with Sasuke we see the devastating consequences of familial duty pushed to the extreme, the village philosophy warped under the weight of massacre. Sasuke sacrifices everything for a cause he is too young to understand.



Spirited Away to the Land of Studio Ghibli

Film and TV Editor **Charlotte Holah** explores the beauty and significance of Studio Ghibli films, having never seen one until this term

The striking forest visuals of *Princess Mononoke*
(TWITTER/ANICONICSHOT)

I'll be honest: I've always been a Disney girl. I know all the princesses' songs off by heart, and could talk for hours about the musical symbolism of *Mulan*. But beyond Disney and Pixar, animation has never been something I've taken that seriously in film; I dismissed Studio Ghibli's work as children's movies in a language I couldn't begin to comprehend. Having spent a week watching Hayao Miyazaki's films, however, I've finally realised what I was missing.

I began with *Spirited Away*. I had little to no expectations, other than the shot of No-Face on the bridge reminding me of Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. But two hours later, and it's up there among my favourite films. Miyazaki weaves together a boundless imagination with a striking colour palette to create a new world of *Kami* (spirits of Japanese Shinto folklore).

I think what made this film so enjoyable for me was its sense of authentic originality. For once, I didn't find myself anticipating formulaic plot twists based on earlier ideas: the characters, narratives and dialogue seemed to me to be one-of-a-kind, and I realised that the childishness I had dismissed Studio Ghibli films for is exactly what gives them their magic.

Miyazaki achieves this through the absence of limitations. Each story is wrapped up in the glow of a child's imagination, welcoming the spectator into blissful innocence. From each film I watched, characters stood out as tableaux in their own design: The flight of the dragon in *Spirited Away* blends into the clouds themselves combining sky and sea into a melted landscape. Similarly, the cat bus in *My Neighbour Totoro* streaks through the countryside and hills with surprising grace, even climbing telephone poles. The reveal of Howl's bird-like form in *Howl's Moving Castle* is breathtaking in its twofold evocation of fear and awe. It would be remiss of me to not mention the Forest Spirit in *Princess Mononoke*, who grows from a seemingly normal, albeit majestic, stag, to a monstrous creature with a tangible control over the landscape around him. Miyazaki introduces us with a pretence of normality, then envelops us in the possibilities of believing the fantastical.

There is also a certain whimsicality to Studio Ghibli which makes me reassess the idea of a family-friendly film. *Ponyo* fits the category, with clear protagonists, a simple narrative, and amusing secondary characters. But unlike so many of the Disney originals that have plagued my expectations, the focus of a happy ending is not on a romantic love. Love, for Miyazaki, exceeds this.

His films showcase respect and adoration for parents, to the point where the few Japanese words I do now know include terms for 'mother' and 'father'. The love between friends and siblings is also championed, with the relationship between Satsuki and Mei being arguably the most important storyline in *My Neighbour Totoro*. Even when a romantic love interest is signified, like Howl and Sophie in *Howl's Moving Castle* or Kiki and Tombo in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, this is not done overtly. The connection between people extends far beyond our expectations of dating or flirting, with true love transcending time and space. Chihiro and Haku's love reveals his identity as a river spirit, which, when compared with the heteronormative marriages of Disney films, highlights the power of a Studio Ghibli storyline.

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‘Miyazaki introduces us with
a pretence of normality, then
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of believing the fantastical.’
”

All of this is not to say that Miyazaki's films are devoid of action, or indeed tragedy. *Howl's Moving Castle*, while based on the novel by Diana Wynne Jones, explores deeper themes. Miyazaki retains elements of a steampunk aesthetic, which, set against the backdrop of extensive green valleys and rural European towns, gives us excitingly surprising visuals. But the real power of this film lies in its attack on the futility of war. Miyazaki expresses his anger towards the US invasion of Iraq through the sadistic Madame Sullivan, who continues the war despite her omnipotence. Only Howl seems to truly understand the idiocy and lasting impact of the conflict: “After the war, they won't recall they ever were human.”

Similarly, *Princess Mononoke* paints a startling picture of humanity as brutal murderers of the world around them. Man-made Irontown's bleak and desolate colour palette contrasts the beauty of the forest, where the trees are bathed in dappled sunlight, and even the shadows of clearings feel safe. Miyazaki favours nature as incomprehensibly powerful, but still milder than the threat of human greed. It's a difficult film to watch in our current climate crisis, but essential nonetheless.

Nature itself is probably the overarching theme of the Studio Ghibli films I've seen so far. It is personified and humanised, to the point where the characters of the landscape are preferable to the people who inhabit them. The meticulously drawn countryside of *My Neighbour Totoro* brings a backdrop of comfortable peace to the sentimentality of the story, while the cascading ocean in *Ponyo* both reflects and expands on how it would appear in real life.

I would happily inhabit all of these worlds. Whether it's Kiki's journey to find a town that will accept her in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Howl's nomadic life of yearning for a place to settle down in *Howl's Moving Castle*, or No-Face's

longing for a simple existence away from greed or money-making, all of these characters are simply searching for a home. The notion of home comes to mean so much more than people or places, but rather a sense of calm within the self: I have a lot to learn from this idea.

Having immersed myself in the worlds of Studio Ghibli, I doubt I'll ever return to being the Disney fan I once was. To even compare the two now feels like an insult to Ghibli. I have so much respect for Miyazaki and his craft, and feel inspired to create my own stories of youthful innocence, belonging and imagination. To put it simply, I have been well and truly *Spirited Away*.

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Theatre

Nepotism: a misunderstood, misused buzzword

Dixie McDevitt explores the debate around theatrical “nepotism”, and how it can be confused with positive collaboration

I’ve heard a lot of muttering about ‘pre-casting’, so dark in tone I’m surprised the mutterers didn’t spit on the street after spewing their bitterness. Cambridge theatre hates nepotism... but it also provides the perfect disguise for it: procedural fairness. Let’s start off by saying something obvious: nepotism is bad. It excludes, it intimidates, it elevates people who were probably already very privileged. But, the way it’s discussed in terms of theatre in Cambridge is, in my opinion, utterly misguided. The process of putting on a production at this university places a great stress on openness and fairness — which seems great, right? In theory, yes, but in practice, it actually creates something insidiously difficult to overturn; a veneer of fairness — a procedural fairness — that often still results in people casting their friends or previous collaborators despite having watched fifty ‘open’, ‘fair’ auditions. This is an outcome that not only disadvantages BAME, disabled, trans and fat performers, but gaslights them in its insistence of its own democratic nature.

In the real world, most performers are not doing cut-throat West-End shows; they are meeting each other, making connections, supporting each other, and creating new work through devising, company work, improvisation. This bracket of performers often includes those who are less ‘castable’ in mainstream projects: BAME people, trans people, working-class people, fat women, disabled people. The supposedly fair and anti-nepotistic procedure of putting on shows in Cambridge is actually stifling these same groups of people, and the diversity of the types of productions we see being put on. The system here explicitly encourages a procedure that starts with a self-appointed Director/Producer pitching shows, and then deciding who else gets to be a part of the project via ‘open’ auditions and applications. This means that the visions of performers for what theatre can be is hugely undermined — if you are a Black performer who is desperate to play Hamlet, then you need to wait for a director who happens to have that same vision before you have the opportunity to even audition for that role. If you’re disabled, and you know you would make the perfect Helen of Troy, all you can do is whack out the



Magic 8 ball. In real life, directors, you won’t have this strange pass to decide what theatre looks like — you will either be at the mercy of producers, or you will go down the much more likely (and fun, in my opinion) route of collaborative devising and theatre-making. This is a skill that is vital for surviving in today’s theatre industry, especially if you aren’t a Tom Hiddleston or an Emma Thompson (i.e. white, able-bodied, middle class, thin) — and we aren’t learning it at Cambridge. Tell me again what is so evil about a Black performer asking their director friend to collaborate with them on their vision of performing Hamlet? As long as they’re open and honest about their process, I see no problem myself. I mean, if directors can self-appoint, why not actors?

I started this article expressing my distaste for nepotism, and now I seem to be advocating it. No: I simply believe this word is outrageously misused in our theatrical community. Nepotism is not performing artists openly collaborating. Nepotism is holding ‘open’ auditions in the name of fairness, and then casting your friends. Nepotism is when an establishment shows favouritism to familiar faces. Nepotism is not a group of young hopefuls setting up a company. Is it nepotism if two young economics students set up a company together out of their gyp? No, it is collaborative entrepreneurship. Now, if a young group of hopefuls create a company, take that

◀“This is a skill that is vital for surviving in today’s theatre industry, especially if you aren’t a Tom Hiddleston or an Emma Thompson (i.e. white, able-bodied, middle class, thin)” (TWITTER.COM/ITSTONYLATTERY)

vile for them to hold open auditions and for the outcome to be the exact same. Even if we assume that open auditions are always carried out fairly, in standardising the procedure for putting on shows across the whole theatre scene, you narrow down not only the people who perform in the productions, but also the range of productions themselves. If we had more explicit routes for company-made work that may deviate from the three-week standard rehearsal process, we would open up the types of productions that demand more time and devising work, and empower performers to change the landscape of Cambridge theatre in an exciting way. When we create an environment in which open auditions (the true openness of which rely solely on individual judgement calls) are accepted as *the only moral way to put on a production*, then we create a drought of theatrical diversity, and we deny underrepresented performers agency over their careers.

It feels mightily unfair that the way our systems are set up, productions can justify all-white casts by saying ‘no BAME people auditioned! We just cast the best people for the part!’ — doesn’t this tell us that the productions that are going on are disenfranchising huge numbers of people? Our current system isolates actors, erases their theatrical visions and pits them against each other. There has got to be a better way. When we listen to underrepresented members of our theatrical community, we cannot kid ourselves that our current systems are fair. I think a better way is to be honest about the times that we do want to collaborate and devise in a company of performers, rather than have a de-facto elite company formed by the same people who get cast in *everything*. You guys, if you love working with each other that much, then do it! Sling on a show together... and let others sling on shows in the other slots. If we were open about process and collaboration, then maybe when productions say ‘open auditions’, we would trust a little bit more that they actually mean it.

“
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artists openly collaborating.
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auditions in the name of
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your friends
”

I’m not saying we scrap open auditions. Open auditions are definitely good; they mean you work with a greater range of people, you perform parts that maybe you wouldn’t have expected to perform, and they are a key component to a diverse range of opportunity. Open auditions become absolutely crucial when we’re talking about establishment productions; for example, I am *not* saying that CUADC or the Footlights should have a green light to fund and create closed projects with a select group of their mates. While it would be vile of them to do that, it would also be

◀“When we create an environment in which open auditions ...are accepted as the only moral way to put on a production, then we create a drought of theatrical diversity” (Pictured: the 2013 Footlights Pantomime) (TWITTER.COM/EMMAHOLLOWS)



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Music

Finding duende: Leonard Cohen and Federico García Lorca

Margaux Emmanuel examines the link between the singer-songwriter and the anti-fascist poet

One of my favourite Leonard Cohen lines is in “Chelsea Hotel #2”: “clenching your fist for the ones like us who are oppressed by the figures of beauty”. This line perfectly encapsulates Cohen’s poems as concentrates of beauty, with Cohen as a poet of genius sharing his fine perception of life – his works themselves are for us these “figures of beauty”, and yet do not “oppress us,” but leave us feeling moved, refreshed and pensive.

Leonard Cohen, the poet and songwriter who left us in 2016, wrote works of heightened emotionality – whether that be “Chelsea Hotel #2”, where he depicts with sincerity his relationship with Janis Joplin, the ethereal “Hallelujah,” the poignant “Leaving the table,” or the entrancing “Take this waltz.” Cohen’s works are dreamlike.

Cohen received the Asturias Prize for Literature in 2011, an occasion on which he spoke of the influence that his time in

Spain had on his work “Everything you have found favourable in my work comes from this place. Everything that you have found favourable in my songs and my poetry are inspired by this soil.” He particularly underlined Federico García Lorca’s impact on his life and poetry, humourously saying that the Andalusian poet had “ruined his life.” In his speech at the Asturias Prize, he spoke of Lorca as granting him “permission to find a voice, to locate a voice, (...) to locate a self: a self that is not fixed, a self that struggles for its own existence.”

Lorca, a Spanish poet of the Generation of ’27, known for works such as ‘Gypsy Ballads’, ‘Blood Wedding’ and ‘A Poet in New York’, left for New York in 1929. Once he came back to Spain, disillusioned, he sided with the anti-fascist Republicans during the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

His political stance, as well as his homosexuality, made him a target for the fascist militia,

who murdered him in 1936 when he was 38.

Cohen, at the age of fifteen, was moved by the surrealism and magic of the Andalusian poet, an influence that would remain with him for the rest of his life, even naming his daughter “Lorca.” This lorquiano’ influence is most palpable in “Take this Waltz,” a song from the 1988 *I’m Your Man* album and a translation from Lorca’s ‘Pequeño vals vienés’ (Little Viennese Waltz), which took him more than 100 hours to translate. This translation is an overt act of tribute and yet, more generally, once you read Lorca and Cohen side-by-side, the Spanish poet’s pervasion in the very fabric of his poetry and song-writing is undeniable.

The emotional strength and sincerity of Cohen’s works can be related to Lorca’s ‘duende’ aesthetics, theorized by Lorca at a lecture in Buenos Aires in 1933, ‘Juego y teoría del duende’ (‘Theory and Play of the Duende’). The figure of the ‘duende’ itself, the word stemming from ‘dueño de la casa’ and also referring to a magical creature, is explained as being ‘not a labour, a struggle not a thought... the duende is not in the throat: the duende surges up, inside, from the soles of the feet... it’s not a question of skill, but of a style that’s truly alive: meaning, it’s in the veins: meaning, it’s of the most ancient culture of immediate creation.’ Even though Lorca uses examples of it stemming from idiosyncratically Spanish cultural aspects, such as Spanish dance, the feeling of ‘duende’ is couched as a universal reaction to the “figures of beauty.” When speaking of duende, Lorca speaks of

Goethe,
Bach, Brahms...

This sensibility is deeply anchored in Cohen’s works. Whether in the solitude and vulnerability of *New Skin* for Old Ceremony, or the

classic *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, Cohen investigates the very threads that constitute human emotion.

◀Cohen, the songwriter who penned ‘Hallelujah’, was profoundly influenced by Lorca (FLICKR/TAKAHIRO KYONO)



▶ his works [...] leave us feeling moved, refreshed and pensive (WIKIMEDIA/RAMA)

“
Once you read Lorca and Cohen side-by-side, the Spanish poet’s pervasion in the very fabric of his poetry and song-writing is undeniable
”

There is also a moribund aspect to duende, as Lorca writes in his 1933 theory: “moribund duende sweeping the earth with its wings made of rusty knives”, an awareness of mortality, that can be discerned in his later album *You Want it Darker*, raw and grim, punctuated with lines such as “I’m leaving the table/ I’m out of the game”, “It’s au revoir,” his voice at the centre, both a sigh and a prayer, which is what this duende’s “dark sound” explores. Leonard Cohen, being Jewish, sang “Hallelujah” as a universal plea that transcends religion and speaks to a core spirituality in us all – we all have our own *hallelujahs*.

Duende is a mode of understanding and creation that is deeply rooted within Cohen’s works – it is not simply a sensitivity and particularly eloquent turn of phrase, but a soulful resonance that evades definition: it must be lived, as Cohen and Lorca’s works makes us live hundreds of different lives through their poetry.



Violet

By VARSITY

Who stole the Van of Death?



▲ “While Boris was pinching the Van of Death, the students of Cambridge had been at the Van of Life and Gardies, so it was all for nothing!” (ALEX LEGGATT)

Jack Bailey

It will not have escaped the attention of Cambridge students and residents alike that there has been a deplorable act of thievery in Market Square – Uncle Frank’s van, the Van of Death, has been stolen!

Having been purloined in the middle of the night from the market, it is nowhere to be seen and nobody is any the wiser as to who did it. How it is that a van is stolen in the middle of a public square in the centre of Cambridge is anybody’s guess, but not everybody’s guess is as good as mine. Using the powers of investigation and deduction that I have been vested with, I have come to a conclusion and narrowed down my list of suspects to two people, both of whom I believe can be reasonably suspected.

It’s obvious. It was either the Vice-Chancellor, Stephen Toope, or the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. It makes perfect sense, and is at least in my mind unquestionable, that either of them may have done it. In true Scooby Doo fashion, there are reasons as to why they both may have committed this fright-

“Toope has done the altruistic thing to save us all and stolen the Van of Death”

ful felony, and indeed, they would have gotten away with it too if it wasn’t for this meddling kid!

Starting firstly with our revered Vice-Chancellor, Mr Toope. On his never-ending mission to save Cambridge from the impending doom and disaster that it faces in these “extraordinary times”, combined with his implacable obsession with academic rigour, he has taken the name of the Van of Death seriously. In his indomitable valour, he has done the altruistic thing to save us all and stolen the Van of Death. Thanks to his act of sheer heroism, no longer can the van carry out its sinister activities. He was really quite unsure why a van that dealt death was ever allowed to trade in the Market Square anyway – but that’s an issue for another time that he’ll take up with the City Council. He remains firm in his conviction that the Council’s Market Trading Regulations do not allow trading in the business of death.

Boris, in his continual cycle of misguided misjudgement and bumbling buffoonery, has heard that these bloody

rapscallion students have been queuing at a Van serving food in Cambridge, thus breaking the Rule of 6 (or whatever it is this week!), violating the crystal-clear Hands-Face-Space protocol, and spreading COVID! Emboldened by both his Oxonian hatred for all things Cambridge, and his Churchillian resolve to save the world country, he steals the Van of Death!

No more will students line up for their food, putting others at risk! No more will the social distancing rules be disregarded! The day, and the country is saved, or so Boris thought.

Upon returning to Downing Street after a long night’s requisitioning of property (he believes it is not thievery if it is done by the government in the public good), however, he learns that the problem of Cantabrigian superspreaders persists! How can this be? Boris was certain he eliminated the cause!

However, in his classic incompetent buffoonery, and traditional out-of-touch nature, he had failed to realise that nobody likes the Van of Death. Where did he think the name came from? He as-

sumed it was related to COVID or something, not realising its name predates COVID. While Boris was pinching the Van of Death, the students of Cambridge had been at the Van of Life and Gardies, so it was all for nothing!

It is unknown whether Boris plans to return the Van of Death and attempt to steal the Van of Life, the real cause of this imbroglio.

However, he is keen that a Van that gives people life should remain operational in this time of plague and pestilence. Again, the euphemism seems to be lost. Maybe if it was known colloquially as the “vehiculum ad sanitas” he would understand (Google Translate tells me this is the rough Latin equivalent, I never studied it!).

Ultimately, despite my investigations and STRONG suspicions, we are no closer to finding out who is responsible for this act of treachery. We hope that whoever it is is brought to justice soon so that the Van of Death can resume trading in Market Square, because it truly is not the same without it.

Violet

By VARSITY

Adapt, improvise, overcome: How I've acclimatised to lockdown island

Alex Castillo-Powell



▲ Isolation Island (IZZY THOMAS)

Nearly a year has passed by since I've been trapped in this lockdown desert island. Time has become meaningless. I just watch the sun go down and feel the shifting gravitational pull of the moon, telling me it's nearly time for tea. The trees have become my friends and the wind speaks to me with its melancholic *woosh*. It's not easy being stuck on this island, but slowly – bit by bit – my body has adapted. My cells regenerate and my survival instincts kick in. This is the story of being stuck on lockdown island and how my body has lived to tell the tale.

Physical Transformation

The days pass, bent over, shoulders

hunched, neck curved, head merging to become one with my laptop screen. I *doomscroll* the internet, surfing the headlines, swimming out to sea only to be carried back to shore with sore muscles and a salty mouth. But the human body is no chump. After a year of bending my neck to merge myself with the screens that consume me, my muscles have kicked in and millennia of Darwinian evolution have been reversed. We no longer stand upright but have taken our place with the other animals. I sit idly on a desk chair and there is no need to bend my neck – it is already there.

Living on this small island, my legs no longer yearn to move as they once did. The energy that has powered *homo sapi-*

ens to travel the seas, to span continents and build civilisations. That energy is long gone now. My body conserves itself, hibernating. My legs wait on standby, the Microsoft logo pinging across all four corners of the screen, waiting for the mouse to move. But I have transcended my legs. They have gone the way of the appendix, and are now just cumbersome, obsolete, leftover. They dangle over the edge of my bed to remind me of another time.

The mouth I once used to converse with friends, to yell unintelligible lyrics on a club dance floor, to shout "I'm walking here", as I walk across a busy road. This mouth is no longer. It still has its uses: munching on *Doritos*, letting out a low grumble of approval as I scroll through Instagram videos, telling the cat to stop meowing. But its role is different now. It conveys messages through morse code mumbles. Gone are the days of inefficient articulation.

The days are long and the nights even longer. My sleep patterns have shifted. The creatures of the island emerge at night-time and my body has synchronised with them, standing guard at 2am, ready for the next YouTube video to emerge out of the wilderness and sink its teeth into me. I man my post deep into the night, anticipating the next frighteningly mediocre Netflix thriller to be thrown my way. Ready to encounter it head on.

Mental Transformation

While my body grows stronger and more efficient, conserving fuel like a

“Like Drew Barrymore in *50 First Dates*, I wake up to a new day and a first date with Adam Sandler, none the wiser”

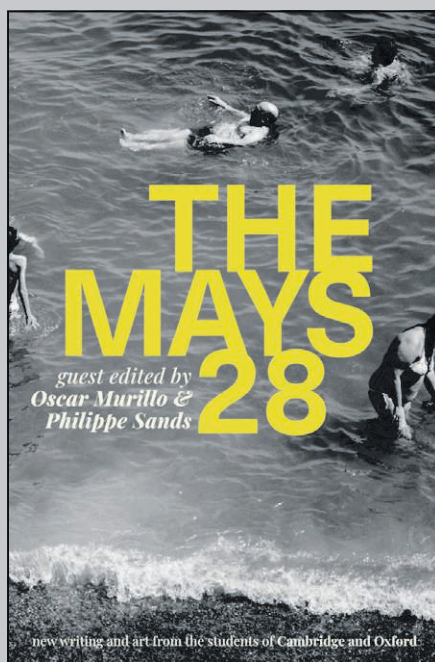
Toyota Prius, my mind re-focuses and re-wires, neural networks shooting off to tackle the problems of the day. I know there is much to do, but if my body grows tired then the jungle creatures will eat me, so my mind meticulously prioritises and compartmentalises the activities of the day. I could do my seminar readings. I could exercise. I could read my book. But that would be giving the island what it wants ... to weaken and debilitate me. Luckily, my mind has grown wise to the tricks of this cruel place.

Life on a desert island can be slow, monotonous and repetitive. You wake up, sharpen your spears, retrieve some coconuts, watch Netflix ... the days tend to merge into one. My mind has adapted to the monotony with selective memory failure, forgetting the past so that every day is new and exciting. When was the last time I went outside? I do not know. When is my essay due? What essay? Like Drew Barrymore in *50 First Dates*, I wake up to a new day and a first date with Adam Sandler, none the wiser.

Escape from the Island

While my mind and body have adapted, my soul still longs for the mainland. When the creatures of the island sleep, I collect wood and branches, preparing to build my canoe – before realising that I can't even assemble IKEA furniture. Still, I persist in my endeavour, tying the branches together with sturdy bits of seaweed, smoothing out the wood with coconuts and staring wistfully at the moon, looking for signs that the sea will soon calm.

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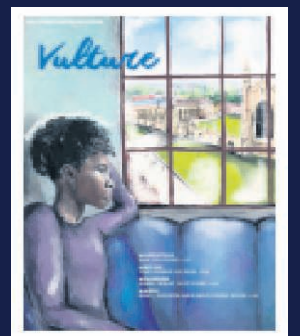
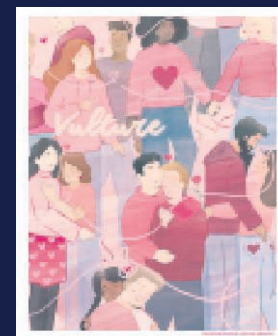


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Sport

“I wasn’t prepared to live with things I thought were wrong”: In Conversation with Lord David Triesman

Sports Editor [Jack Wadding](#) speaks to the former Chairman of the FA about corruption, prejudice and dysfunctionality at the highest levels of football governance



▲ Lord David Triesman: Chairman of the FA from 2008-2010 (LORD DAVID TRIESMAN)

Content Note: This article contains detailed discussion of anti-Semitism.

King’s alumnus Lord David Triesman is a fascinating character. Having graduated from the University of Essex, he arrived at Cambridge in the autumn of 1969 to carry out a PhD in “essentially economics” over the next three years.

Given the restrictions of a 30-minute conversation, we were forced to skip forward a few decades from there, through a life-long membership to the Labour Party, to 2008, when Lord Triesman was appointed as the first independent Chairman of the Football Association (FA).

His description of the two years that followed reveal a deeply flawed system of sporting politics. Ultimately, Lord Triesman found that it was an environment he was unable to operate effectively in. Here’s why.

Football has been a part of Lord Triesman’s life since childhood. Raised as a Spurs fan, he’s quite literally done it all: playing, coaching, refereeing and finally, governance. He tells me that he played in the school scheme run by Spurs, which offered places as apprenticeships. Despite not reaching such heights, he continued to play semi-professional football at Suffolk side, Bury Town, while he was at university in Cambridge.

Later in life, having achieved his FA Gold Coaching badge, he coached the Camden U16s team and casually mentions that the side included one John Barnes. Yes, *that* John Barnes. He went on to describe him as already “a superb player”. Unsurprisingly, Lord Triesman has therefore been the patron of the

Tottenham Hotspurs Foundation since 2004.

Having established his love of the game, Lord Triesman went on to discuss the relevance of his political experience to his position as Chairman, which has allowed him a fascinating insight into the world of party politics and a unique comparison with sporting politics. He described his time in the FA as “very like running a party”, in that, as a politician, “you’re used to balancing out interests”.

He continued to make a direct comparison between the powerful elite and the masses that provide the lifeblood to both politics and sport. However, it soon became clear to Lord Triesman that “it’s harder in football because the wealthy people control where all the money goes”. This proved to be a theme throughout his time at the top of the football pyramid.

The reason that the balancing of interests within the FA proved “much, much harder” than within a cabinet was because, “the only thing that really mattered to [representatives] was the interest of the organisation that had sent them”, whether that’s the Premier League, the EFL or the amateur leagues.

And the dysfunctionality didn’t stop there. According to Lord Triesman, “the Premier League would say to the others: ‘this is what we want you to do and remember you get all your money from us’” and “it was often put as crudely as that”.

Lord Triesman believes there is a solution to this dysfunctional system of domestic sport governance. That is, to copy the French. He tells me that, in France,

“they have sports laws created by the government, in which there is a kind of deal done”, which involves a significant degree of freedom for the sporting body, until mistakes or malpractice become evident.

At this point, the government is legally permitted to intervene. Given that the role of FA Chairman is currently empty, Lord Triesman believes that this should be one of the priorities of whoever next fills the role. This clarification of relationships should, he argues, “make a profound difference”.

Our conversation then moved on to a defining period of Lord Triesman’s time at the top: the England World Cup 2018 bid. As we all know, that bid, held in 2010, was won by Russia. In the run up to the vote, Lord Triesman was forced to resign as FA Chairman, following a private discussion about the possibility of corruption within FIFA, that was recorded for the Mail.

With a decade of hindsight, we all now know that Lord Triesman was onto something. Having resigned from the FA, he spoke to the UK government about the corruption he had witnessed, describing FIFA, as he did to me, as a “mafia family”. Eventually, in 2015, a significant number of high-ranking FIFA officials were prosecuted on the grounds of corruption. Lord Triesman gave me an insight into what it was like to work in such an environment.

“You realised you were with a group of people who bore no relationship to the rest of the world”, he explains, since “they were... using football to live like monarchs. And they had no concern about anybody else”. He adds that he “cannot remember an occasion where somebody said ‘hang on a moment, what will the fans want’”.

The shocking thing was that they made no attempt to hide their corruption. “They all seemed to imagine that, because you were lucky enough to have found yourself in the middle of that gang, you would want the same thing” so “they were never particularly secretive about it”, he tells me. “If stuff was left, as it was frequently, in my [hotel] room, I’d just leave it there”, he recalled, and “I said to my colleagues in the FA who were on the international circuit: ‘You don’t want it either. It’s corruption and you don’t want it’”.

Lord Triesman went on to confess that he sadly “never thought we would win the bid” in 2010. “I would love to have thought it”, he said, “but Sepp Blatter had made it very clear to me that if England got it, it would be over his dead body”.

This Anglophobic stance derived from

the fact that, he apparently “hated the fact that we were called ‘The FA’”, rather than ‘the English FA’, on account of being the first football association, founded in 1863. Lord Triesman “also knew that we were never going to bribe people to get it”, unlike a number of other federations, which certainly reduced the likelihood of winning over the 22 voters.

Having spoken out, he was told that he was “insulting the football family”. Upon reflection, Lord Triesman said that “[he] cannot operate in that kind of world and [he doesn’t] believe any of us should”. Ultimately, he believes: “if the only way a system can work is in an atmosphere of deep corruption..., then there’s something so sick about it that we should shake it until it falls to pieces and start again”. However, he is optimistic that the shakedown of 2015 may have made up some ground.

Shockingly, the corruption that Lord Triesman witnessed was perhaps not the worst of the tolerated behaviour at FIFA. In 2013, he revealed that he had been subjected to explicit anti-Semitism, particularly by Argentinian FA President Julio Grondona. It was publicly known that he had said on Argentinian television that “you couldn’t have Jews as referees because they were too lazy and would take bribes”.

Furthermore, following a heated debate at a conference focussing on the introduction of goal-line technology, Grondona

▶ “They were a group of people who were using football to live like monarchs”

(WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



“

I cannot operate in that kind of world and I don’t believe any of us should

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“straightforwardly” said to Lord Triesman that “it was a great pity that Hitler didn’t finish the job”. This man was the Vice-President of FIFA from 1988 to 2014.

As you can probably tell, Lord Triesman is a right-thinking man, who, during his relatively short career in football governance, was subjected to a significant degree of dysfunctionality, criminality and prejudice. The bottom line for Lord Triesman was that “[he] wasn’t prepared to live with things [he] thought were wrong”. Ultimately, it’s a shame that there were not more like him, since he envisions football, one day, to be in a better state. This is something that football fans around the world can surely agree on.