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# VARSITY

## 'I refused to give in'



The Cambridge master's student who helped Afghan students escape Kabul

Georgia Goble  
Senior News Editor

Master's student at the Cambridge Judge Business School, Selene Biffi, has helped three of her former pupils escape Afghanistan. Biffi told *Varsity* that she "spent days working round the clock on papers, logistics and coordination" to help her students and their families escape to safety.

The students all formerly attended the Qessa Academy in Kabul, Afghanistan — which Biffi founded in 2013.

### 'Don't abandon me'

In August, as the Taliban took over the Afghanistan capital, Biffi started receiving texts from her former students.

'Don't abandon me', one message read. "Distressed is the first word that comes to mind when thinking about those moments," Selene Biffi told *Varsity*, "although that was certainly not the only feeling then: there was sadness, anger and pain too, all of them in equal, overwhelming measure. However, I refused to give in and watch things unfold from a distance, and instead leveraged the feelings I had to look for options to help."

### 'I thought we wouldn't be able to get into the airport'

Sayed Wakil Hussaini, one student who Biffi helped escape Afghanistan, received a message from his former teacher shortly after the Taliban took

Kabul. The message asked him for a list of his family members who required evacuation.

Biffi then instructed Hussaini to travel to Kabul airport early the following morning.

The chaos surrounding Kabul airport that day, with members of Taliban firing shots into the air, initially led Hussaini to believe that escape was unlikely. Hussaini eventually managed to get on a plane to Italy. The family left all their possessions behind.

In a "concerted effort," Biffi also helped two other families escape Kabul on the same day as Hussaini.

"It was made possible by people in both Italy and Afghanistan, who have

selflessly helped me make it happen," Biffi explained. "It wasn't easy at all."

Despite her relief that Biffi was able to answer her pleas to leave the country, one of Biffi's former students, Soheila Dorosti, remains fraught with grief and worry; "I love my country", she told CNN, "I love my people, I have a lot of friends in my country, and I don't know what's happening for them. It makes me so sad."

Dorosti is now residing in a small town in southern Italy.

Following a period of quarantine, the students were reunited in Italy with their former teacher.

## A farewell from Toope: the Vice-Chancellor's tenure so far

Georgia Goble  
Senior News Editor

Stephen Toope announced last week that, after five years, he would retire from the role of Vice-Chancellor in September 2022, cutting his expected seven year tenure two years short. As the Vice-Chancellor prepares for his departure from the role next year, *Varsity* takes a look back at some of his key moments.

### The COVID-19 crisis

Toope's time in office has undoubtedly been overshadowed by the tremendous difficulty of a global pandemic, which he has cited as a contributing factor to his decision to step down. He made the difficult decision in March 2020 that students would not return to the University in person over Easter Term 2020, and that all face-to-face teaching, as well as in-person exams, would not go ahead. Similar decisions were made over the course of the last academic year. Despite criticisms from students that "academic rigour" was prioritised over the mental wellbeing of students in a period of such high anxiety, Toope has overwhelmingly referenced his leadership through the pandemic as a success: "We kept the university on track and safe during its hardest years since World War II."

But after four years of controversies, outrage, and some successes littered in between, there has been far more to Toope's tenure than his efforts to manage the COVID-19 crisis over the last 19 months.

### Free speech rows

Characterised by the right-wing media as the "woke" Vice-Chancellor who is, contrary to his rebuttals, "stifling" free speech at the University, Toope's decisions during his time in office haven't always been popular in the press. In

Continued on page 2 ►

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## News

## EDITORIAL

Summer signified the reopening of the United Kingdom. Now, as the days become shorter, we stride into Michaelmas Term with the same hopeful vision of rejuvenation, a quasi-return to normalcy buoying our spirits and burgeoning our optimism.

And optimism is certainly needed, as the world around us continues to shift for better, and for worse. In Afghanistan, the Taliban stormed Kabul, forcing the mass exodus of local peoples as well as ex-patriots. In an interview with Varsity, Master's student, Selene Biffi, recalls her desperate, and thankfully successful, attempt to aid the escape of three of her former pupils (News, Page 1).

In central Cambridge, Vice-Chancellor, Stephen Toope, announced his retirement after five years in the position, bringing his chancellorship to a premature end. We explore the legacy of the Toope tenure, including the successes of divestment and the controversies of on-going relations with China and the United Arab Emirates (News, Page 2).

A few hundred metres away from the Senate House, where Toope will give his final address on Friday (01/09), Varsity spoke exclusively with the President of the Cambridge Union, Keir Bradwell (Interviews, Page 18). We learned of the Union's hopeful determination to reform controversial election procedures and to address questions concerning access and diversity.

Within this context of change, it is with great excitement that we welcome all incoming students. We look forward to many a pint, or coke zero, with the forthcoming Fresher cohort, if not for an excuse for a laugh, but most importantly to extend our care, considerations and empathy with Fresher week nerves.

In Features (Page 10), Ellie Austin encourages Freshers to take a moment to breathe, to acknowledge where they are: how far they have come.

If you're an inexperienced walker, practice swinging those arms: the Arts team have compiled a ten-day tour of the must-see sites in central Cambridge (Arts, Page 22). After all, academia is only 50% of your Cambridge education (don't tell your supervisors this!), and the Film & TV and Theatre teams have put together guides to the Cambridge film and theatre scene to push you out of the library and into the world (Film & TV, Page 22; Theatre, Page 28).

As always, the beginning of something new simultaneously signals a departure from the past. At least initially, if not intermittently, this can be overwhelming. We hope that this edition serves to unpack the challenge of navigating the processes of beginning and ending. Embrace the uncertainty: most of us will only get one crack at Cambridge!

Nick and Isabel

## ► Continued from front page

## Adapting to life away from Afghanistan

On the challenges that her students will now face as refugees, Biffi highlighted that "adapting to a new country is never easy." She also stressed the importance of "getting documents first and foremost and receiving support at the centres they are currently staying at." Biffi said that the families will need "considerable patience" throughout the process, for which they are receiving some help.

"Many people have reached out to me to ask how they can support," Biffi continued, "and some of them have sent items or are sending messages of support directly to my former students on a daily basis."

"They all have hopes and dreams for their future outside of Afghanistan, and I hope we will be able to support them fulfil these dreams as much as possible," Biffi concluded.

## The "school for storytellers"

Selene Biffi founded the Qessa Academy with money she won from the Rolex Award for Enterprise. The academy has been described as a "school for storytellers", aiming to support the preservation of traditional Afghan folk tales by "creating a venue for master storytellers to teach their craft to younger generations."

Some of Biffi's former students have gone on to work at local radio stations and as teachers.

Biffi is a Master's student in Social Innovation, as well as a social entrepreneur with a focus on education and youth empowerment.

Biffi also co-authored *The Teacher of Kabul*, a book about her experiences in Afghanistan and her dedication to "re-build from its roots" a country devastated by war.

## "Everything looks very dark"

After the US withdrew troops from the country, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August, facing little resistance as they entered Kabul, with President Ashraf Ghani's rapid departure leading to the collapse of the Govern-

“  
Taliban officials are yet to make a decision on the matter of the education of girls  
”

ment. Tens of thousands of people were desperate to escape the country, with memories of the Taliban's former rule, decades previous, looming.

The BBC reported last week that Afghan girls are being prevented from attending secondary school. Many fear the return of the Taliban's restrictive regime in the 1990s, which saw the rights of women and girls heavily rescinded in the pedagogical sphere and beyond.

The New York Times reported on Monday (27/09) that women will be banned from Kabul University.

Taliban officials are yet to make a decision on the matter of the education of girls, but have previously stated that women will be able to work and study in compliance with its interpretation of Sharia Law.

"Though on the one hand I'm very relieved that [my students] were able to come to Italy," Biffi commented, "I'm very worried about everyone else who could not leave the country."

Varsity has contacted the Cambridge Afghanistan Society, the University, and the Cambridge Judge Business School for comment.



▲ The Vice-Chancellor will depart from the the role in September 2022 (LOUIS ASHWORTH / VARSITY)

## ► Continued from front page

March 2019, Toope was criticised for 'de-platforming' Jordan Peterson — the controversial "professor against political correctness" — in a freedom of speech row, when Peterson had his visiting fellowship rescinded by the Vice-Chancellor due to accusations of Islamophobia. Many staff and students supported the move.

The rescindment of Peterson's invitation was allowed under the University's 2016 Freedom of Speech Statement, which outlined that students, academics and visiting speakers must "respect" each other's opinions, and that the University reserved the right to "prohibit speaker events that might threaten the 'welfare' of students, staff or the general public." Toope had backed the statement, an unpopular decision among some who saw it as a threat to free speech. The statement was later overruled by a Regents House vote in 2020, and the wording was amended to "tolerate". The amendment won back some favour with Toope's most prolific media critics, but was not welcomed by others, including Cambridge English Professor Priyamvda Gopal, who argued that it would give "eugenicists, racists, and transphobes a prestigious platform."

Criticisms from the press have been

so relentless throughout Toope's tenure that some have speculated that they have contributed to his premature departure from the role of Vice-Chancellor, which Toope himself has denied.

## Controversies: China

In addition to arguments over free speech, Toope has similarly faced a lot of backlash for the University's international financial dealings, with the UAE and China alike.

Just this month The Times published claims that Chinese telecommunications company Huawei had "infiltrated" the Cambridge Centre for Chinese Management (CCCM).

This came following the controversial publication of a white paper written by the Jesus College's UK-China Global Issues Dialogue Centre (UKCC) in 2020 in conjunction with Huawei, which raised eyebrows after it was revealed that the UKCC had received sizeable donations from Huawei.

While the postscript of the report claims that all conclusions in the report were reached on the basis of "academic freedom", this led to concerns that such freedoms at the University had been compromised. The UKCC's report contains a foreword from Professor Toope, wherein he describes that he was "espe-

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It was expected that Vice-Chancellor Toope would meet with the Crown Prince of the UAE in June, but it remains unclear whether this took place  
”

cially pleased to acknowledge this initiative" as the "the University of Cambridge has had a long and proud tradition of engaging with China."

At the time, Jesus College stressed that "there is a clause enshrining academic freedom and free speech written into the research collaboration agreement."

## Controversies: proposed collaborative initiative with the United Arab Emirates

In July 2021, Varsity broke the news that the University was in negotiations for a 10 year £400 million collaborative initiative with "several educational, governmental, and corporate partners in the United Arab Emirates," with £312m of contributions coming from the UAE directly.

It was expected that Vice-Chancellor Toope would meet with the Crown Prince of the UAE in June, but it remains unclear whether this took place. The University stated they will be "reflecting over the next few months" before any decisions are made on the collaboration.

The proposed deal sparked controversy due to concerns about LGBTQ+ rights, freedom of expression and women's rights in the UAE, as well as its record of "human rights abuses."

The documents acknowledge the "values gap" as well as the burden the collaboration could place on "academic freedom" at the University, but described it nonetheless as an "exciting and unique opportunity."

## Achievements

Despite several controversies, Toope has had some commendable achievements during his time as Vice-Chancellor.

Professor Toope established the Advisory Group on Legacies of Enslavement in early 2019; this aimed to commission research into the University's involvement in, or links to, the Atlantic slave trade, and "other historical forms of coerced labour."

The group advises the Vice-Chancellor in the appropriate action to be taken in light of its findings; the group's final report is expected to be published in 2022.

Toope has also established a Foundation Year scheme for disadvantaged students along with the Cambridge Student Support Initiative, with three core aims:

**EDITORS** Isabel Sebode & Nick Bartlett [editor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:editor@varsity.co.uk)  
**DEPUTY EDITORS** Akshata Kapoor & Emaan Ullah [deputyeditor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:deputyeditor@varsity.co.uk)  
**MAGAZINE EDITOR** Lily Maguire [magazine@varsity.co.uk](mailto:magazine@varsity.co.uk)  
**DEPUTY MAGAZINE EDITOR** Margherita Volpato [deputymagazine@varsity.co.uk](mailto:deputymagazine@varsity.co.uk)  
**BUSINESS MANAGER** Mark Curtis [business@varsity.co.uk](mailto:business@varsity.co.uk)  
**NEWS EDITORS** Bethan Moss, Georgia Goble & Louis Hodgson (Senior); Jacob Freedland & Jolyn Koh [news@varsity.co.uk](mailto:news@varsity.co.uk)  
**NEWS CORRESPONDENTS** Serge Isman & Aoife Petrie  
**INVESTIGATIONS EDITORS** Caitlin Farrell  
**INTERVIEWS EDITORS** Juliette Gueron-Gabrielle, Stephi Stacey & Isabella Todini [interviews@varsity.co.uk](mailto:interviews@varsity.co.uk)  
**FEATURES EDITORS** Ellie Austen & Inés Magré (Senior); Nabihah Ahmed & Lotte Brundle (Deputy) [features@varsity.co.uk](mailto:features@varsity.co.uk)  
**OPINION EDITORS** Olivia Young & Ramsay Hodgson (Senior); Emily Kelly & Frankie Richards (Deputy) [opinion@varsity.co.uk](mailto:opinion@varsity.co.uk)  
**SCIENCE EDITORS** Sambavi Sneha Kumar (Senior) & Nieve Brydges (Deputy) [science@varsity.co.uk](mailto:science@varsity.co.uk)  
**SPORT EDITORS** Liam Kline (Senior) & Damola Odeyemi (Deputy) [sport@varsity.co.uk](mailto:sport@varsity.co.uk)  
**VIOLET EDITOR** Conall Hughes, Oona Lagercrantz & Evie Lucas [violet@varsity.co.uk](mailto:violet@varsity.co.uk)  
**ARTS EDITORS** Emma Hulse & Famke Veenstra-Ashmore [arts@varsity.co.uk](mailto:arts@varsity.co.uk)  
**FILM & TV EDITORS** Magdalena Gabrysiak, Amber de Ruyt & Holly Sewell [filmandtv@varsity.co.uk](mailto:filmandtv@varsity.co.uk)  
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**FASHION EDITORS** Olivia Rhodes & Muhammad Syed [fashion@varsity.co.uk](mailto:fashion@varsity.co.uk)  
**THEATRE EDITORS** Stanley Lawson & Fergal Jeffreys [theatre@varsity.co.uk](mailto:theatre@varsity.co.uk)  
**LIFESTYLE EDITOR** Amy Howell & Ellie Wilson [lifestyle@varsity.co.uk](mailto:lifestyle@varsity.co.uk)  
**HEAD OF ILLUSTRATIONS** Eden Keily-Thurstein [magazine@varsity.co.uk](mailto:magazine@varsity.co.uk)  
**CHIEF SUB-EDITOR** Chloe Bond [subeditor@varsity.co.uk](mailto:subeditor@varsity.co.uk)  
**DIGITAL EDITORS** Tilda Butterworth [digital@varsity.co.uk](mailto:digital@varsity.co.uk)  
**ASSOCIATE EDITORS** Gaby Vides, Georgina Buckle, Gabriel Humphreys, Meike Leonard, Stephi Stacey, Cameron White, Christopher Dorrell [associate@varsity.co.uk](mailto:associate@varsity.co.uk)  
**VARSLITY BOARD** Dr Michael Franklin (Chairman), Prof Peter Robinson, Dr Tim Harris, Michael Derringer, Mark Curtis (Company Secretary).

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offering financial support to students, establishing postgraduate scholarships and promoting student mental health and wellbeing.

In October 2020, Toope announced that the University would fully divest its £3.5 billion endowment fund from

fossil companies by 2030, after years of student campaigning. He also committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2038.

Despite Toope celebrating the University's divestment plan as one of his biggest achievements, the decision has proved unpopular with some: XR Cambridge stated that this decision would

allow for "10 more years of ecocide and fossil fuel investment."

**Conclusions**

It is clear that Professor Toope has both fans and naysayers among students, staff, and the press alike. His decisions, deals and policies — sometimes controversial — have undoubtedly had

a large impact on the University and its reputation over the last four years.

The Vice-Chancellor is expected to make his annual address to the University today (1/10).

*Varsity has contacted the Vice-Chancellor and the Cambridge Student Union for comment.*

# Strikes in Cambridge: Current challenges, past efforts and pandemic struggles

This year, two strike ballots will run: one on the 'four fights' issues, the other on disputes over the USS pension scheme

**Caitlin Farrell**  
Investigations Head  
**Serge Isman**  
News Correspondent  
**Jolyn Koh**  
Deputy News Editors

Last week (22/09), the University and College Union (UCU) confirmed the opening of strike ballots at UK universities, from Monday 18 October to Thursday 4 November. One to resolve issues of "pensions and pay, unsafe workloads, casualisation and equality failings," otherwise referred to as the 'four fights' issues, and the other pertaining to disputes over the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension schemes.

**The 'Four Fights'**

This follows the ratification of motions at the Higher Education Sector Congress by the UCU Higher Education Committee in June this year, which called for a strategy to defend the "four fights" issues and mobilise members.

Findings from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) in 2019 revealed that the pay of staff has been reduced by "around 17% in real-terms since 2009."

Data from the Higher Education Staff Statistics (HESS) show that only 28% and less than 1% of professors in the UK are women and Black respectively, with Times Higher Education (THE) revealing a gender pay gap of 15.1%, in April 2019.

A Cambridge UCU spokesperson told *Varsity* that the branch has also been focusing on campaigning for anti-casualisation, to obtain "fundamental worker's rights for college undergraduate supervisors," claiming that colleges contract around 5,000 supervisors annually, 90% of which are "individual contractors and not on payroll."

Speaking to *Varsity*, Dr Lorena Gazzotti, Cambridge UCU Branch Secretary, commented: "The intransigence of the Colleges vis-à-vis the demands of undergraduate supervisors is simply disgraceful. It's extraordinary that such a large proportion of the quality individual and small-group tuition, upon which the reputation of Cambridge is based, is being delivered by people who basically have no workers rights."

The UCU is demanding "a £2.5k pay increase; an end to race and gender pay injustice; a framework [to] eliminate the use of precarious contracts, such as zero-hours employment; and meaningful action to tackle unmanageable workloads."

**Pension Reduction**

Additionally, a ballot over pensions follows employer body Universities UK's

(UUK), a consortium of 140 institutions, decision to reduce employers' original pension contribution.

The UCU has criticised this decision by stating that it was based on a "flawed valuation" of how the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), the UK's largest higher education pension fund, performed "at the beginning of the pandemic as markets were crashing".

Based on USS' 2018 valuation, contributions from employers were expected to increase by 2.6% while members would have contributed 1.4% more, from 21.1% and 9.6% to 23.7% and 11% respectively.

However, following USS' 2020 valuation, the new contribution rates are 21.4% for employers and 9.8% for employees — translating to a 0.3% and 0.2% increase respectively, compared to the previous rates based on the 2018 valuation.

The USS has cited the "rising cost" of providing the scheme's current benefits, based on the 2018 valuation, as being behind the new contribution rates. The body stated that without reform of the scheme, members would be required to pay 18.6% of their salary, and employers 37.6% as early as April 2022, up from 9.6% and 21.1% currently.

The UCU proposed that employers' pay 3.8% more than they presently do (from 21.1% to 24.9%), while USS members pay 1.5% less than their current contributions (from 9.6% to 8.1%).

If the Cambridge branch votes in favour of industrial action, strikes could possibly take place before the end of Michaelmas, the same spokesperson told *Varsity*.

**Previous UCU Strikes in Cambridge: Successes and Ongoing Efforts**

Cambridge has seen three waves of UCU strikes in the last four years: over pensions in 2018, and over pensions and the 'four fights' — pay inequality, pay deflation, job insecurity, and rising workloads — in 2019 and 2020.

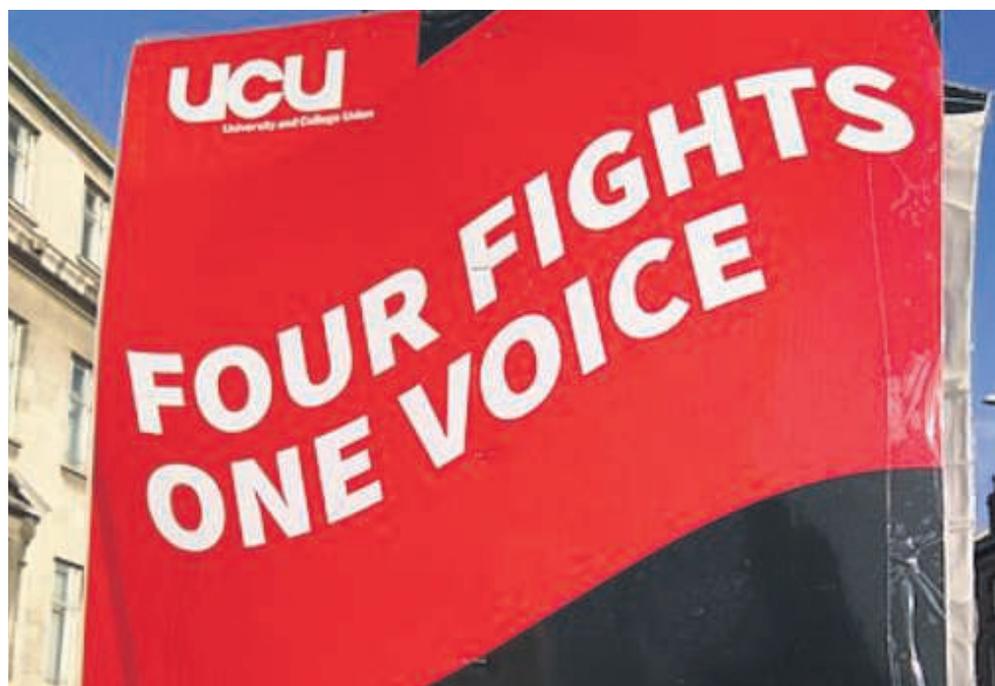
In February 2018, Cambridge was one of 65 universities across the UK where UCU members undertook 14 days of strikes to challenge proposed changes to pension schemes for staff earning under

£55,000 a year.

This came after UUK's plans to replace 'defined benefit' with 'defined contribution' pension schemes. These proposals were presented as a measure to tackle the £6.1 billion deficit of the USS at the time. The proposed 'defined contribution' scheme would have subjected the value

UCU maintained that employee contributions should not rise above 8% of salaries, rejecting a compromise put forward in August 2019 by UUK that would have capped employee contributions at 9.1% — conditional on UCU not holding strikes on pensions for two years.

The second wave of strikes, lasting



▲ The UCU is demanding a pay increase, an end to race and gender pay inequalities, ending of casualisation and workload reduction (ALARICHALL / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

of pensions to stock market fluctuations, rather than maintaining them as guaranteed income upon retirement, with the UCU claiming this would deprive the average lecturer of an extra £10,000 a year upon retiring.

In response to the strikes, UUK proposed the introduction of a 'Joint Expert Panel' (JEP) — a body comprising three members appointed by UUK, three members appointed by UCU, and an independent chairperson — to re-assess the proposals.

While the JEP deliberated, USS announced that, in accordance with statutory procedure, it would raise both staff and employer contributions to maintain benefits as the legal deadline for addressing its deficit had passed. The increases would be introduced over the course of a year and, according to data from the USS' March 2017 actuarial valuation, see staff contributions rise from 8% to 8.8% in April 2019, 10.4% in October 2019, and 11.4% in April 2020.

In November 2018, USS agreed to a new valuation of the fund as it stood in March 2018. This valuation found that it had a deficit of £3.6 billion, and that employee contributions would need to rise from 8% of salaries to 11.0% by April 2020 in order for 'defined benefit' pensions to be maintained.

eight days in November and December 2019 and involving over 40,000 staff at 60 universities, made demands concerning the 'four fights' — pay inequality, pay deflation, job insecurity, and rising workloads — as well as pensions.

In 2019, UCU criticised UCEA's offer of a 1.8% pay increase, which failed to match the retail price index (RPI) measure of inflation for that year, and found that the UCEA made "no meaningful offer on workload," and "limited" offers on precarious contracts and gender and racial inequalities.

When UCU held two strike ballots in September 2019 - one rejecting pension contributions greater than 8% of salaries, the other demanding action on the 'four fights' - turnout cleared 50% and 79% of UCU members who voted backed strike action.

In Cambridge there was a 57% turnout, with 80% supporting strike action and 90% favouring action short of strike, such as a marking and assessment boycott.

Following this round of strikes, the University of Cambridge HR Committee agreed to review around 700 fixed-term contracts to identify staff who could be transferred to open-ended roles, and

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## FEATURES

### Letters to our fresher selves



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## OPINION

### Texas is the rule, not the exception



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## SCIENCE

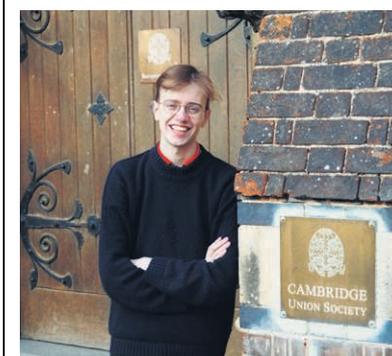
### Want to change the world?



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## INTERVIEWS

### Union President Keir Bradwell on voting and access in the society



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# News

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to consider the transfer of hourly paid teachers to employment contracts.

At the national level, UCEA published a set of proposals in January 2020 pertaining to job insecurity, workloads, and gender and racial inequality, while refusing to make concessions on the pay rise.

In a briefing circulated to members, UCU took this as evidence that there is “little doubt that the union has made progress on the three non-pay issues [...] as a direct result of the successful strike action undertaken by UCU members.”

The latest round of strikes, which amounted to 14 days in February and March 2020, involved up to 50,000 staff at 74 universities.

In a February briefing for UCU members, UCU negotiators laid out the objectives of another strike for the ‘four fights’ issues: ensuring UCEA’s proposals become “reality for staff on the ground”; obtaining stronger commitments on some issues, especially workload; compelling UCEA to increase pay by more than 1.8%.

The continued impasse over pensions — with UUK setting employee contributions at 9.6% of salaries, while UCU maintained that they should not surpass 8% — also prompted the

strikes.

The strike days were staggered across a four-week period, with two strike days in the first week, three in the second, four in the third, and five in the fourth.

In Cambridge, the strikes culminated with Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope inviting UCU to submit a formal claim

for recognition,

which

would give it the right to be consulted during the University’s decision-making on issues such as staff pay and redundancies.

However, Cambridge UCU rejected the University’s recognition deal as it was limited to the representation of academic staff, and did not cover research and administrative personnel. Cambridge UCU

continues to call for full recognition for all of its membership, launching its ‘Recognition Now’ campaign in May 2021.

**In June 2020, UCU criticised the newly launched ‘Sustaining University Research Expertise (SURE)’ package that sought to provide financial support for research during the pandemic**

### COVID-19: Exacerbating Fault-lines

With the onset of national lockdown at the end of March 2020, Jo Grady, UCU General Secretary, wrote in an online statement to members that the pandemic was “further exposing and exacerbating” the issues at the heart of the strikes.

In June 2020, UCU criticised the newly launched ‘Sustaining University Research Expertise (SURE)’ package that sought to provide financial support for research during the pandemic. The government promised to cover up to 80% of income losses due to reduced international student intake for the academic year 2020/21, and sought to provide “low-interest loans with

long pay-back periods” in addition to a “small amount of government grants.”

The UCU claimed that the package “fail[ed] to put students and staff at the centre of its recovery plans” and makes clear that “universities who focus most on teaching will receive little of the new money”; meaning erosion of academic capacities and staff layoffs, in particular affecting BAME and contract staff.

In November 2020, over 1,127 academics and 92 PhD students and researchers [as of 27/09/21] signed an open letter addressed to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), following its decision to disallow further extensions of time or funding to PhD students not in their final year despite having their research disrupted.

The letter called for UKRI to “urgently rethink” its plans and to better make use of its £6 billion budget to fund students so as to better support the Higher Education sector and its members.

Speaking to *Varsity*, a Cambridge UCU spokesperson stated that the pandemic has “greatly increased the workload, and as a result the stress levels” of many of its members.

**During the 2020 Lent Term staff strikes, CamSU volunteers organised a student support programme for staff on picket lines**

The shift to remote learning required university staff to “[go] beyond their call of duty to deliver safe teaching in constantly changing circumstances.”

Michael Abberton,

Branch President, added that “despite the commitment of the [Vice-Chancellor] not to make any staff redundant due to COVID-19, we have seen many jobs at risk of redundancy across the University due to organisation restructuring.”

He continued that this potentially reveals “a worrying trend towards outsourcing” symptomatic of “a fundamental lack of respect for hard-working and dedicated staff — and no recognition of the effect on the wider community.”

### Student Support for Strikes

Cambridge Student Union (CamSU) has in the past been an active supporter of UCU strikes, with some of CamSU’s paid staff members striking alongside lecturers.

During the 2020 Lent Term staff strikes, CamSU volunteers organised a student support programme for staff on picket lines, including delivering tea and coffee to strikers and attending daily rallies on King’s Parade.

CamSU also provided a list of student study spaces which avoided crossing picket lines, and creating a student mentoring and book-sharing scheme.

*Varsity* has approached CamSU for comment about the possibility of strikes in Michaelmas 2021.

*Varsity* contacted the University regarding the claims that the organisational restructuring may cause some jobs to be at risk of redundancy. In response, the University commented that “the proposed UCU industrial action is about pay and pensions. The University’s priority is our community. We are committed to working with our unions at Cambridge and doing everything in our power to support our staff and students at this time.”



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# Archivist discovers chair of 18th century author while ‘rummaging in storage’

**Aoife Petrie**  
News Correspondent

A chair which belonged to Laurence Sterne, an eighteenth-century author, has been found in a storeroom in Jesus College. The artefact was found by Robert Athol, a Jesus College archivist, while “rummaging in storage” to look for a new chair for his desk.

Between 1733-1737 Laurence Sterne studied at Jesus College. Following his ordination, he served as vicar of Coxwold.

Sterne “achieved celebrity late in life”; he was already 46 when he published *Tristram Shandy* in 1759, a popular comic novel which brought him “instant success” and made him into a best-selling author.

Athol knew the chair was important when he saw its Latin plaque, which read: “Here sat Laurence Sterne”. After finding “bundles of letters” which detailed the chair’s ownership, he realised it was authentic.

The letters revealed that the chair had been passed down by successive vicars in Coxwold, Yorkshire, and in 1928 was given to Jesus College.

After this discovery, Athol got in touch with the Laurence Sterne Trust. The chair was then returned to Sterne’s home, Shandy Hall, now a museum dedicated to him in Coxwold.

The Curator at Shandy Hall, Patrick Wildgust stated: “We have very few things that belonged to Sterne — letters perhaps are the closest you can get to a writer — but we now have the chair in which he sat.”

“I can imagine there will be writers who would be delighted to sit in Sterne’s chair. It can add another dimension to the fact he was a living, breathing writer. It’s a delight for us to be able to have it.”

▶ (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



# News in Brief

## Homerton principal Lord Woolley: ‘Drug Prohibition is racist in its DNA’

**Bethan Moss**  
Senior News Editor

In an essay published in the British Medical Journal yesterday (30/09), Woolley — ex-No 10 adviser and newly instated principal of Homerton College — says the UK Misuse of Drugs Act is being used as “a tool of systemic racism.” The essay argues that Black voices need to be listened to more in drug policy debates, and calls for a review of whether the Misuse of Drugs Act is fit for purpose.

“

*Current drug policy fails everybody. But it fails black communities in particular*

”

## Cambridge student short-listed once again for BBC Young Writers’ Award

**Louis Hodgson**  
Senior News Editor

Tabitha Rubens has been shortlisted for the 2021 BBC Young Writers’ Award, having also made the cut in 2018. The 19-year-old two-time finalist has been described as “one of the country’s brightest writing talents” and is currently studying Chinese at Gonville and Caius.

Rubens is one of five finalists, each of whom was required to write a short story of under 1000 words. Rubens’ provocative piece is titled ‘Super-powder’ and explores the topic of human insecurity in a “highly original and experimental” way.

Rubens has also enjoyed success outside of this competition as the winner of the HG Wells International Short Story Competition in 2020. She aspires to become an author and illustrator.

Rubens told Varsity that “this award in particular is unique as it amplifies the voices of young people, whose opinions often go unheard, illustrating the importance and power of stories.”

The winner will be announced on Radio 4’s Front Row on the 19th of October.



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## News

# Regeni inquiry arrives in Cambridge

**Cameron White**  
Associate Editor  
**Georgia Goble**  
Senior News Editor

*Content Note: This article contains brief mention of graphic physical injury*

An Italian parliamentary delegation has travelled this week to Cambridge and held talks with University of Cambridge representatives. The delegation are seeking answers to “some of [the] unanswered questions” surrounding the 2016 abduction and murder of 28 year-old PhD student Giulio Regeni in Cairo.

Regeni had travelled to Cairo in September 2015 to conduct research into the Egyptian economy and independent trade unions, before disappearing on 25th January 2016. His body was recovered nine days later in a ditch by a desert highway between Cairo and Alexandria, with an examination of his body revealing signs of burning, beating and mutilation, and an autopsy also revealing broken ribs and a brain haemorrhage.

Egyptian police initially claimed that Regeni had died in a car accident. Media at the time speculated that he had been

swept up in a police raid against demonstrators marking the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. However, Italian prosecutors did eventually charge four members of Egypt’s national security agency in December 2020 for his murder and kidnapping after almost five years.

However, the four security officials charged by Italian authorities — Tariq Saber, Athar Kamel Mohamed Ibrahim, Capt Uhsam Helmi and Maj Magdi Ibrahim Abdelal Sharif — were cleared by Egypt’s public prosecutor Hamada al-Sawy on 30 December 2020. al-Sawy claimed at the time that “the perpetrator is unknown.” The trial by Italian prosecutors is subsequently due to take place *in absentia*, with the Egyptian state refusing to extradite the four suspects.

Erasmus Palazzotto, the president of the Italian parliamentary delegation, told the Guardian that the University of Cambridge is not under investigation, since “We all know those responsible for Giulio’s abduction, torture and murder”. Rather, they “believe [the University’s] help is needed [...] to help [...] find answers to some of the unanswered questions.”

Palazzotto further noted that, having been in contact with the University

“for a few months [...] they have shown us their willingness to collaborate.” The delegation is expected to speak with representatives, including the Dean and professors specialising in the Middle East who had worked with Regeni.

The Guardian reported that the delegation also requested to speak with Dr Maha Abdelrahman, Regeni’s supervisor, who has been historically criticised over a perceived lack of cooperation with the inquiry into Regeni’s death. Palazzotto commented that her “reluctance to collaborate with the Italian prosecutors was a problem for the investigation”, adding: “I hope she agrees to speak with us. I hope she helps us understand what happened, and explains why she decided not to collaborate with the Italian authorities.”

In December 2016, an article in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* accused Dr Abdelrahman of insincerity in her questioning with the relevant authorities, and of encouraging Regeni to pursue research in an area which she allegedly knew could pose danger and which he was purportedly reluctant to pursue. This prompted several academics to publish a joint letter in her defence in the Guardian in 2017, claiming that Regeni had experience working in Egypt before approaching

Dr Abdelrahman for supervision and that there was no “indication at the time that this research posed a threat to life.” The letter also denied allegations that Dr Abdelrahman was uncooperative with Italian authorities, claiming that she participated in interviews at Regeni’s funeral in February 2016 and wrote responses to questions on 15 June 2016, indicating that she would answer further questions in writing.

When Italian prosecutors charged the four Egyptian security officials in December 2020, the University released a statement soon after, defending Dr Abdelrahman from “malicious allegations” which recirculated over her supposed lack of cooperation with the initial inquiry. The statement fought back against “old and baseless assertions that she did not cooperate with the original investigation,” arguing that these “demonstrate[d] a fundamental — and



▲ A February 2018 vigil outside the Egyptian Embassy in London marks the second anniversary of Giulio Regeni’s murder (ALISDARE HICKSON/FLICHR)

continued — lack of understanding about the relationship between PhD students and their supervisors, which is one of support, critique and advice rather than instruction.”

When approached for comment on the arrival of the delegation for talks in Cambridge this week, a University spokesperson told *Varsity*: “The University has received a request from the Italian Parliamentary Inquiry into the death of Giulio Regeni to host a small delegation visiting Cambridge. We look forward to welcoming the delegation, and to engaging with its members openly and constructively.”

“Like the Inquiry,” the statement continued, “the University of Cambridge is determined to find justice and truth for the family of Giulio Regeni.”

The spokesperson did not comment on whether Dr Abdelrahman participated in these talks.

During a virtual vigil commemorating the fifth anniversary of Regeni’s death in January this year, Daniel Zeichner, Member of Parliament for Cambridge, argued that the UK should “use [its] influence to get to the truth about cases like [Regeni’s murder]”, with a new UK-Egypt Association Agreement having come into effect on 1 January 2021.

The Italian delegation also planned to this week meet with representatives from the British government and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), with Palazzotto saying in the Guardian: “It’s important to involve the British government. The death of Giulio has shown that the Egyptian regime does not spare Europeans from violence, to whom it reserves the brutal treatment that its citizens suffer every day. No one is safe from the violence of the Egyptian dictatorship. And the European and British governments cannot continue to have friendly and economic relations with a man like [President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi], pretending not to see what is happening in that country.”

The FCDO did not respond to a request for comment.

On the subject of this week’s delegation from Italy, a spokesperson for Zeichner told *Varsity* that “at the heart of this is a tragedy. A Cambridge student with his whole life ahead of him had his life

brutally cut short. Giulio’s family, friends and colleagues need justice and truth. Since Giulio’s murder the Egyptian authorities have continued to consolidate their authoritarian rule with the military intervening in political life, restrictions on free speech, violence and intimidation. Sadly, throughout the last few years the Egyptian authorities have been unhelpful in finding Giulio’s murderers.”

The statement continued: “But this case has wider implications too. It is about academic freedom and about human rights. This visit will hopefully help Italian Parliamentarians to gain a greater understanding about the nature of academic research in the U.K., and about the relationship between PhD students and their supervisors.”

A spokesperson for Cambridge University Amnesty International (CUAI) told *Varsity* that they “reject the allegations made towards Dr Abdelrahman that she was insincere or uncooperative in her communication with Italian authorities, and strongly oppose statements made in some news outlets that have blamed the University for putting Giulio Regeni’s life at risk.”

They continued: “the delegation coming to Cambridge should be a grave reminder that the human rights abuses being committed in Egypt against researchers, journalists and activists are ongoing, with seemingly no effect on foreign relations. For example, Patrick Zaki has been detained since February 2020 and will be put on trial for “spreading false information”, with a five-year prison sentence on the line. Yet still, arms trade and friendly relations between Italy and Egypt continues.”

“What we hope most of all”, the spokesperson added, “is that the results of this delegation, combined with years of inquiry, will lead to those responsible for Regeni’s death in Egypt to finally be extradited and held accountable.”

The parliamentary commission will conclude their work on 3 October, with the content of the hearings with Cambridge representatives due to be published in over a weeks’ time.

*Varsity additionally approached Amnesty International Cambridge City Group (AICCG) for comment.*

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# Cambridge alumnus highlights growing trend of anti-Asian hate crimes

**Louis Hodgson**  
Senior News Editor  
**Caitlin Farrell**  
Investigations Head

*Content Note: This article contains mentions of racism and racially motivated violence*

Yuanzhao Zhang, a Cambridge University alumnus, has highlighted a growing trend in Asian hate crimes in Cambridge, after he fell victim to racial assault on September 18th.

The attack took place in a Cambridge Co-op during Zhang's weekly shop, where he was badly beaten by over 10 teenagers. There have been several other incidents since, which Zhang believes may be connected.

Zhang sustained serious injuries and required nasal surgery to treat his broken nose and septum. The teenagers were not arrested and Zhang believes that they are responsible for several other incidents that have taken place since his own assault.

Zhang has since set up a website to highlight the growing number of anti-Asian incidents in Cambridge and has received 30 responses to his "incident accounts" form, which encourages Asian residents of the city to speak up about any hate incidents that they have experienced.

One respondent recalled having to escape to their college after three white men yelled racial slurs and chased them. Another response said that a group sprayed juice on them. The anti-Asian incidents have been reported all over Cambridge, including on Parker's Piece and on Mill Road.

Several respondents to Zhang's form claim to have been harassed by the same group of teenagers, which Zhang says is "beyond outrageous." Zhang also reported that the group may be connected to other incidents not involving Asian victims.

Zhang's petition to 'Stop Asian Hate' has now gained over 1500 signatures. The petition calls on the local government to respond to the "growing trend of Asian students/citizens being harassed" in Cambridge.

Zhang spoke to *Varsity* about how this growing hate crime rate should be dealt with, saying "it would be a great start to increase funding to the police." He added that "the University and the police both haven't done enough to stop this gang. Especially given that the majority of the people harassed/attacked are students."

He has said that it is "appalling" that the Cambridgeshire police have not made an arrest given the frequency of the attacks.

Daryl Preston, the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner, has released a statement in response: "There is no place for any kind of racially mo-

tivated crime in our county and I can assure you that these recent incidents are being taken very seriously by the Constabulary."

"To victimise anyone for who they are is inexcusable. I want to remind anyone who finds themselves targeted for abuse because of their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, that they should report it to the police."

The Chinese embassy has issued a statement to Chinese nationals living in the UK, urging them to be vigilant following the recent attacks in Cambridge and elsewhere. The embassy expressed sympathy and solicitude towards the victims of any attacks and urged UK officials to apprehend the offenders.

This recent attack comes amidst a growing anti-Asian hate movement. Lucy Cavendish alumnus Yinsey Wang is the co-founder of Voice ESEA (East and South East Asians), an organisation dedicated to education around anti-Asian hate crimes and aiming, according to their founding Instagram post, to "champion solidarity with people of all races and backgrounds."

Wang set up a petition in August, which has since closed with over 22,000 signatures, aiming to push Parliament to offer victims of COVID-related anti-Asian hate crimes support funds and strengthen anti-racism programmes.

The government response to the petition on 28/04 stated that it has "been appalled at the attacks that East and South-East Asian communities have endured as a result of the pandemic and condemn them unequivocally."

Voice ESEA has also conducted research on local police forces' recording of and responses to these hate crimes via a set of freedom of information requests to over 40 police forces in the UK. In an interview last month with Voice ESEA's data collection team, Abbey Wong, the Data Team Lead, stated that the project aimed to "build an understanding of the scale of police-reported hate crime in different regions."

Cambridgeshire Police's response recorded 23 anti-Asian hate crimes over the course of 2020, with 7 of them taking place in February, when coronavirus first became a point of significant national attention. 3 of those crimes in February, as well as an additional 4 over the rest of the year, were flagged as COVID-related. This represents a 21.78% increase from 2019 to 2020 in anti-Asian hate crimes in Cambridgeshire.

Voice ESEA concluded by commenting that "these rates may not be reflective of the full scale of figures given [that] victims may not wish to report such incidents to the police for a variety of reasons."

# Homerton principal, Lord Woolley, to give up a percentage of his salary to provide bursaries for disadvantaged Homerton students

**Krystian Schneyder** Bethan Moss  
News Correspondent  
**Bethan Moss**  
Senior News Editor

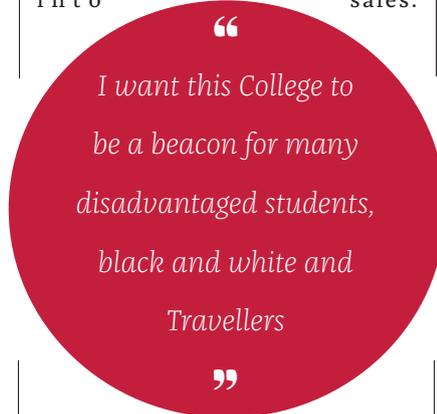
Lord Simon Woolley — Homerton College's new principal — has pledged to provide two full bursaries, each worth £3,500, to students from low-income families at Homerton College, according to a press release. The bursary is intended to help students meet their living costs and participate fully in Cambridge life.

The College commented: "Lord Woolley views his contribution as a reflection of his determination to help students from all backgrounds to benefit from the opportunities offered by Homerton."

Lord Woolley will become principal of Homerton College this week. He said: "I want this College to be a beacon for many disadvantaged students, black and white and Travellers. I will be working my socks off to increase our level

of diversity."

Woolley grew up on a working-class council estate in Leicester. He left school before A-Levels to become a car mechanic and later moved into sales.



Given his background, Lord Woolley says he felt in the past that "Oxbridge was not a place for me. Part of it was reality, these were very posh places. Part of it was my own exclusion mentality."

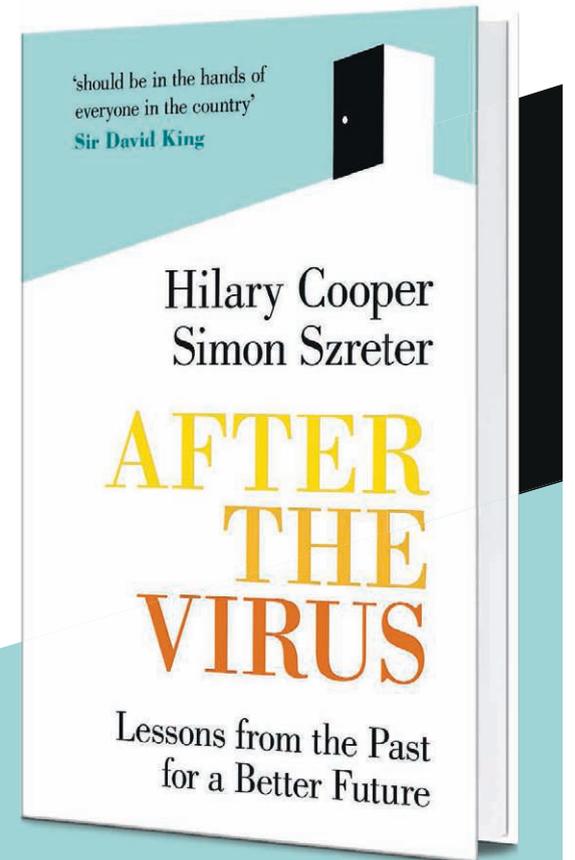
"The Cambridge Bursary Scheme is a brilliant way to help level the playing field for disadvantaged students," Woolley stated, "and I want my donation to Homerton to be a signal to all those - Black kids, white working-class kids, the Traveller community, council house kids like me - who might worry about the cost of university, to say that there is help available."

Lord Woolley is the first Black man to head an Oxbridge college and was recently honoured with a "Lifetime Achievement Award" at the National Diversity Awards.

In 1996, Woolley founded Operation Black Vote (OBV). The NGO works with ethnic minorities in the UK to increase understanding of civic society, participation in Parliament and public life, and to promote equality and human rights. OBV has helped Britain's political and civic institutions to become more representative of people of colour.

► Continued on page 8

*After the Virus* is a provocative manifesto for change post-COVID-19. Shining a light on the deep fractures in our society, Hilary Cooper and Simon Szreter reveal why the UK was unable to respond effectively to the pandemic and what we can learn from our own history to forge a fairer, more resilient future.



'It should be in the hands of everyone in the country, particularly in Parliament, who cares about, and has responsibility for, our future.'

**Sir David King**, former UK Chief Scientific Adviser and Climate Envoy, Chair of Independent SAGE

Join the manifesto for change at [www.cambridge.org/afterthevirus](http://www.cambridge.org/afterthevirus)



## News

# Controversial professor Jordan Peterson to return to Cambridge after being disinvited in 2019

The Canadian academic has been invited by the Faculty of Divinity, who rescinded a previous visiting fellowship offer in 2019

**Bethan Moss**  
Senior News Editor

Controversial Canadian psychology professor Jordan Peterson is to spend

between ten days and two weeks at Cambridge in November. He has been invited by Dr James Orr from the Faculty of Divinity to attend a variety of engagements and seminars.

An offer of a visiting fellowship was previously extended to Professor Peterson — who has been criticised for his views on transgender rights, the patriarchy and race — in Michaelmas

2018, but it was subsequently rescinded in March 2019 after the academic was photographed with a man wearing an Islamophobic T-shirt.

In 2019, Vice-Chancellor Stephen

Toope said that the professor's "casual endorsement" by association was "antithetical" to the work of the Faculty of Divinity, a decision labelled by Professor Peterson as a "serious error of judgement." More recently, after Toope announced plans to end his term at the helm of the University, Peterson tweeted that "Toope's Cambridge has become a preposterous place."

Speaking in 2019 on the rescindment of Peterson's visiting fellowship, a University spokesperson stated: "[Cambridge] is an inclusive environment and we expect all our staff and visitors to uphold our principles. There is no place here for anyone who cannot." *Varsity* put this to the University, asking what has changed since then. They responded with a statement emphasising that "Peterson has accepted a personal invitation from one of our senior academics."

Regarding this year's planned visit, the University stated that Peterson is to "participate in research seminars on the relationship between the philosophy of religion and the psychology of religion, the challenges of interpreting sacred texts, and the place of religion in society today" while in Cambridge. They specified that the engagements "will be scholarly dialogues rather than discussions open to the general public."

Writing in *The Telegraph*, Arif Ahmed MBE, a reader in philosophy at the University, claims that the visit is a "litmus test" for Cambridge, to determine whether it is "on the side of the Enlightenment or the mob."

The news of Professor Peterson's visit comes as debate around freedom of speech and de-platforming at universities has once again captured the attention of the national media, as the government's Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill is debated in Parliament.

In 2019, the Cambridge University Student Union (CUSU) (now reformed as the Cambridge SU), told *Varsity* that they were "relieved" to hear that Peterson's fellowship had been rescinded.

*Varsity* has contacted the CSU for comment regarding Peterson's renewed invitation to Cambridge.

## ► Continued from page 7

Woolley was appointed by Prime Minister Theresa May to create and lead the UK Government's Race Disparity Unit. He was knighted in June 2019 and became a member of the House of Lords the same year, where he sits as a cross-bench peer.

"If there is a lesson to be learnt from my journey, it is to believe a council house kid can do great things", Woolley stated.

Lord Woolley said he feels "honoured" and "humbled" about his role at Homerton. He added that "Its mission for academic excellence, along with embracing diversity, is a combination for great success not just for the students but for wider society too."



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# Features

## Hiraeth: my encounter with linguistic loneliness

◀ Lucy's home town of Carmarthen in Wales  
(PICTURE BY LUCY HILL)

**Lucy Hill** grapples with her fear of losing touch with her native language and what this means for her Welsh identity

I would like to think that I wasn't alone in experiencing some apprehension before leaving for Cambridge to embark on my degree last October. My anxieties were, at any rate, offset by a buzzing anticipation at the prospect of university life and, as is so often the case, the scenarios which I had gone over in my mind ultimately bore little resemblance to reality. Obstacles which eventually presented themselves had never previously crossed my mind and some were trickier than others. I could just about get used to the lack of a sofa in my college accommodation, but a longing for the language of my childhood was proving harder to navigate. I wasn't under any illusions; I had known that fellow Welsh speakers were going to be hard to come by in East Anglia, and was at ease with the prospect of having to restrict my use of the language to phone calls home and the long vacations. But I had obviously never fully appreciated the sheer extent to which yr iaith Gymraeg coloured my quotidian in the rural community where I grew up, and I quickly started to feel its absence. The reality of having no one in Cambridge with whom to speak Welsh had set in, and I had a sneaking fear that casual conversations would soon be corroded by the rust of disuse and that meaningful use of my language might one day be lost to me altogether.

The irony of this latent unease is that I had come to university with the hope of broadening my linguistic horizons, my choice of degree being French and Latin. It seems almost perverse that I might graduate with an impressive proficiency in these languages at the expense of the one through which I received my primary and secondary school education, and which is inextricably linked to so many of my formative experiences and memo-

ries. As a student of languages, and more specifically in studying an (arguably) dead language alongside a modern lingua franca, I am conscious of the fragility of language, as well as the potential for minority tongues to wither in the shadow of global giants. Latin, French and English have all been manipulated as instruments of empire in their time, and their influence continues to span continents. While these linguistic titans loom no larger in my own imagination than my native Welsh, the unfortunate fact of the relative inconsequence of my

“  
*I wasn't under any illusions; I had known that fellow Welsh speakers were going to be hard to come by in East Anglia*  
”

language beyond the green, green grass of home has prompted me to worry that, try as I might, I simply won't be able to find an outlet through which to foster my ongoing relationship with it. I fear that those who hold Welsh in contempt as 'an irrelevant tribal language' will ultimately win out, and that any long-term decision to live outside of Wales is tantamount to an active rejection of the language which I hold so dear.

That said, there is good evidence to suggest that my fears of loss are rooted in a false cynicism. Abandoning the personal in favour of

the big picture makes for a far more optimistic outlook. As Duolingo recently made an impressive debut on the stock market, noted in many of the reports on its success was the factoid that Welsh is the fastest growing language on the app in the United Kingdom. This certainly bodes well for the devolved government's target of a million speakers by 2050. Perhaps, as globalisation has instigated the increasing homogenisation of societies and their cultures, the very fact that Welsh is a minority tongue can be harnessed in its favour. There is something novel about the linguistic oddities that it has retained in being spoken by such a small pool of people, and it can be said to be rendered intriguing in its unfamiliarity.

This potential for the language to flourish is certainly promising, and its growth can surely only be a good thing. On a personal level, I am determined to use my Welsh more over the next academic year. The easing of COVID-19 restrictions should go a long

way to facilitating this resolution, as it becomes easier to meet and spend time with a broader group of people. I will, of course, be away in France for my third year of study, and this is a period which I have set aside for feeding my linguistic curiosity in a different way. Ultimately, I hope that my recent

realisation of the fragility of my relationship with my native tongue will mean that I am never so complacent as to let it go, and that it will continue to be an important part of my identity long into the future, wherever I find myself in the world.



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# Letters to our fresher selves

The *Features* team share the advice they would give if they had a chance to speak to their first-year selves

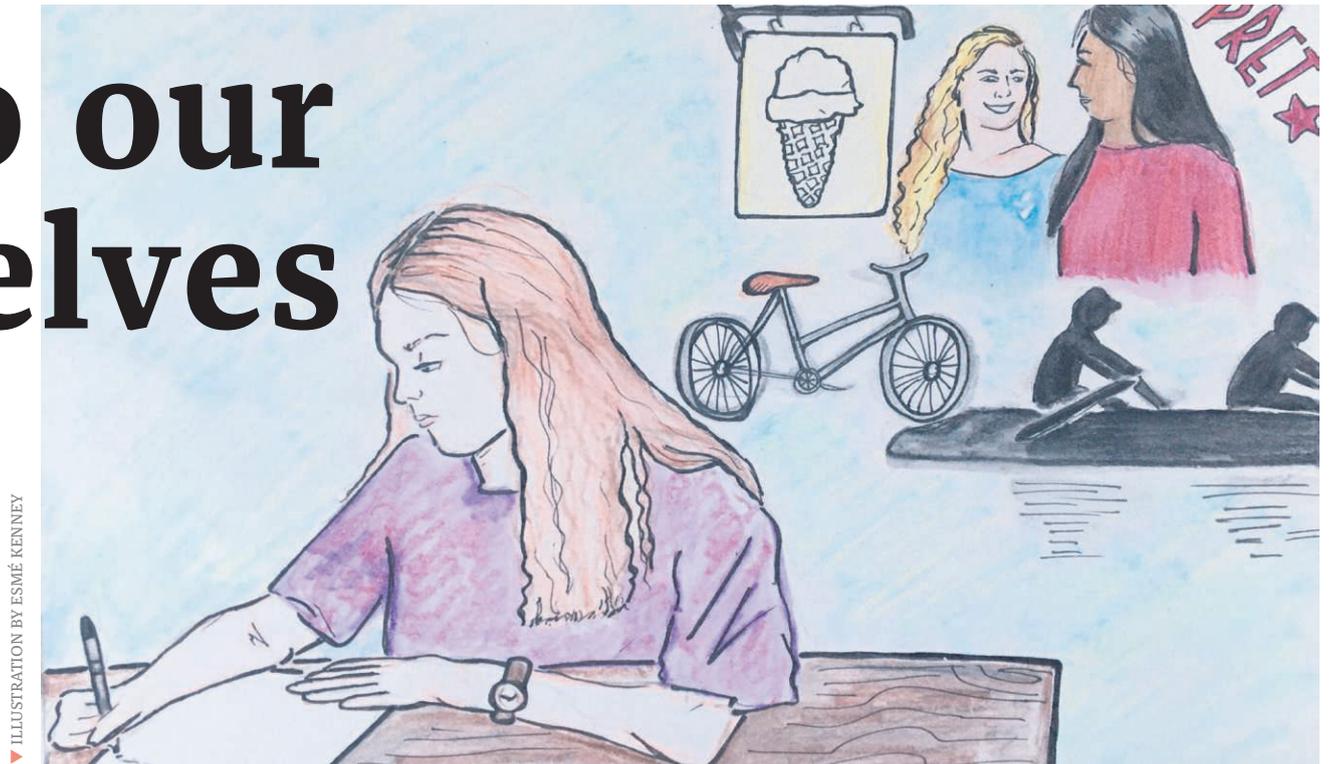


ILLUSTRATION BY ESMÉ KENNEY

**E**mily: Take a minute to realise where you are. You haven't until now. You've got your results, had your summer, packed, and now you're moving in. But take a minute. Go out onto the balcony and look at where you'll be living.

Take your time with everything this year. There really is time enough for you to breathe between supos and starting your next essay. If you just slow down, things will seem less stressful. The cliché fear that you will never see anyone you meet in freshers again is simply not true. You meet some great people. And you can survive without an oven — despite your weekly urge to oven cook a pizza. Do some exercise. If you have time to get two iced coffees from the café and walk into town

I understand you're too busy going between feeling anxious about what's to come, guilty about what you've left behind, and terrified of shared bathrooms to hear anything I have to say. The work will get easier when you realise you're meant to do the work, and not the other way round. You don't need to spend four hours to understand a ten page story in Old English — the characters are probably just doing it in a pear tree. Stop sitting in Newnham's library for four hours only to leave with pictures of the pretty ceiling. Not

▼ ELLIE AUSTEN

a lot. Forgive people earlier — it feels fantastic. And as for the bathrooms, they're much worse than you think. Suck it up until you get an en-suite, I guess.

Don't wait until Easter to try Jack's Gelato. And stop telling people that you're dropping out; deep down we both know you won't give up that easily. In fact, I want to thank you for being so resilient — it paid off.

Love you always,

Your much more good-looking, wise, and humble second-year self.

**Ceci:**

Don't work too hard. Yes, I know, that sounds like terrible advice, but it's true. Everyone tells you before you start university that three years will fly by and you don't believe them, but that's exactly how it goes. And — you'll learn — the moments that you will remember are not the hours you spent in the library or the lecture you had that Wednesday morning in November.

Pay attention to the other parts, the early morning rowing outings, the picnic lunches on Jesus Green, the late-night dinner parties and last minute pub trips. These are the things that you will miss most, not the workload. Understand that they are new and fleeting, even when they come to feel familiar. Hold on tight to the people you meet and the moments you share with them. That's the

▲ NABIHA AHMED

best bit.

**Ellie:**

My advice for you, dear baby-fresher Ellie, is to take a moment and breathe. Moving to a new city is hard, starting university is hard, doing Natural Sciences at Cambridge is hard — you can forgive

yourself for finding it difficult at first. Lots of things go wrong but these situations are often catalysts for beautiful change and growth, and they also help to bond you with the new people around who come to your aid, so lean into the chaos. The best thing you can do right now is trust yourself and be patient. You'll make friends, but don't freak out if it doesn't all fall into place immediately — my only clue is to seek out interesting conversations, and the rest will come naturally. Time will slip away, as it always does, so take lots of photos, write lots of entries in your journal, and check-point the good moments when you can. Oh, and bring a bike — the roads really aren't as scary as they seem, and the extra thirty minutes of sleep will make a huge difference to your life.

Lots of love from elderly third-year Ellie.

**Inès:**

Your identity neither starts nor ends at being a Cambridge student. Yes, you worked hard to get here, but now everyone you are surrounded by has achieved the same ultimate goal. Embrace all facets of your identity and don't just accept them: consciously lead your life and university years in a way that ensures you never have to compromise any part of yourself.

Have fun and laugh a lot. Join societies, talk to strangers, go on dates, go travelling, work a little, and, once in a while, let yourself cry. Recognise when those tears are more than just Week 5 Blues and seek help. Talk to your friends. You might have only just met them, but I promise, they're still here a year on and are probably struggling with very similar things; their support will help make you the happiest you've ever been.

It's not going to be perfect but you will have experiences and conversations that you can't even grasp yet, so hold on for the ride. But remember you're not indestructible and are always allowed to stop. Eat well, drink less, exercise, and listen to music; your body and mind will thank you for years

beyond the fleeting three you will spend here.

**Lotte:**

Dear first-year me,

The year ahead will not be the first year you imagined. It will be markedly different in many ways, and yet you are about to have a fantastic time. Although the workload will be, at times, outrageously challenging; and the night-times, especially the first couple, soberingly lonely; you will finally learn what it means to live away from home, and function, for the first time, completely independently. It is terrifying. It is exhilarating. I can't wait for you to get started.

Best of luck!

Lotte x

**Hannah:**

Dear 18-year-old Hannah,

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but that Freshers' Week you're looking forward to? You'll spend most of it crying down the phone to mum because you don't understand the essay title for your first supervision. The second essay will also leave you in tears, and you won't even make it through the third. In fact, you will cry over every essay you write this year — except for the exams, which will be an inexplicable triumph.

It's not all bad, though! You'll stay in touch with your best friends so don't worry about that and you'll make some amazing new ones along the way (hint: don't be embarrassed to offer a cupcake to the girl on your staircase on moving day). You'll have intense crushes, accidental first dates, and although we still haven't had our first kiss yet, you'll stop worrying about that.

But the truth is that despite all of this, the next few years will be some of the hardest years of your life. It's going to take all of your strength to muddle through, so I just wanted to say thank you. I owe you everything and although I know you haven't seen how all your hard work paid off, just know that it did.

See you on the other side!



▲ LOTTE BRUNDLE

all the way from Robinson, you have time to go to the gym.

There will be setbacks — an essay that didn't go to plan, ridiculously late nights, the queue at Pret being stupidly long. But right now, take a minute to stop and look at the gardens. Think of how exciting the next three years of your life are going to be; how exciting we'll make them.

Love from,  
Second-year you

**Nabiha:**

My dear first-year Nabiha,



everyone in Cambridge calls their mum 'The Dame' or shops exclusively at M&S. And even if they do, talk to them. They could be fun. Yes, it may be hard to find people both as brown and as broke as you but it will happen. Some of your best friends will be both, one or the other, and even none. Call people more — they miss you

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# Opinion

## Are we calling survivors brave or asking them to be?

Reflecting on her own experiences, [Scarlett Croft](#) argues how survivors of sexual assault and gender-based violence are repeatedly victim-blamed in current discourses on survivor bravery, denied holistic support, and retraumatised by reporting systems



*Content note: this article contains detailed discussion of sexual assault, transphobia and gender-based violence*

“When I walk down the street, I want to be free, not brave.” — Julia Davies, March 16th 2021. Davies lived in Sarah Everard’s neighbourhood in South London and identifies in this quotation that the accolade of ‘bravery’ glosses over the realities of gender-based violence. Whilst for many women, non-binary and trans people it does take courage to walk down the street, there is a misdirection in just focusing on individual acts of bravery. Peoples’ existence should not be habitually dictated by the experience or expectation of violence; bravery should not be a routine requirement for leaving the house. This outlook serves the view that someone’s identity inevitably warrants potential abuse, and that their existence in public spaces will always require an evaluation of potential risk. I feel there needs to be a space within

consent culture and feminist discourse to evaluate how descriptors like bravery can feed into what author and academic Katherine Angel describes as ‘confidence feminism.’ Angel’s term addresses the cultural appetite to embrace ‘a feminism that places the onus on individual women and their assertiveness to overcome challenges and succeed’. This thinking implies that it’s up to individuals to intervene and overcome potential abuse. It is a feminism that once fed into my own thinking; after I had been sexually assaulted I looked for ways I could have displayed greater strength. These beliefs led me to self-blame, believing I wasn’t brave or strong enough to resist, and thus was assaulted. In reality, the assault had nothing to do with me or my response – it was to do with a man and his violence.

After my assault, the term bravery felt pretty meaningless to me, as I witnessed how quickly it could be rescinded. A woman who I was living with at the time of my assault relabelled my strength

of character and past actions as a form of naivety. Whilst she had once applauded the fact that I went to parties and drank alcohol, she later used

these behaviours to victim-blame me. Her detached denial of my experience stayed with me; she even found ways to explain away and dismiss the visible wounds relating to the assault. My lived-experience and discernible fear were apparently insufficient evidence that something awful had happened. She informed me that, above all, this experience (which she never called by its name – rape) would teach me to be safer! I was certainly more afraid. My experience with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – sadly common for survivors – simply made me feel like there was no conceivable way to be safe. From my point of view, if nothing was safe there was really no way to be brave either.

I believe that whilst being called brave can feel affirming and grounding – as with all words its application matters profoundly – it can act as a barrier for meaningful conversations to support

survivors and hold abusers to account. If I am brave then it’s because I sought the right support at the right time. This is not possible for everyone. Responses to gender-based and sexual violence are so often warped by identity and affluence. We listen to *certain* peoples’ stories, as privilege and forms of oppression often intersect, and there are fixed expectations of what survivors of sexual violence look like and how they act. This has nothing to do with bravery, it’s about social attitudes towards assault and survivors’ varying access to support.

Survivors need holistic support: emotional, psychological, physical, academic, and financial. Crucially, they need support which feels appropriate to their needs, for instance in the type of therapy available, and the identity of the therapist. This is not the case at Cambridge. Currently, the university has one trained Sexual and Assault Harassment Advisor (SAHA), for a student population of 18,736 students. A single advisor cannot possibly meet the specific needs of potentially hundreds, if not thousands, of students – no matter how qualified they are. The university’s one-size-fits-all approach produces increased wait times for support and will not always be appropriate for survivors. This councillor is not legally able to provide help if you are reporting sexual violence. Though emotional support is invaluable, practical solutions, advice and guidance are seriously lacking from the university’s support systems for survivors.

Such negligence gives a very clear message to survivors: be brave, keep it together, but don’t expect us to do anything. This approach is shockingly common and re-traumatising. It’s uncannily similar to the mindset of the woman I was living with at the time of my assault; both doubted my experience: did it really happen? Do we have to talk about it now? Are you sure it wasn’t your fault? Survivors need to be heard, believed, and have actions taken which reflect the gravity of their experiences. This ideal shouldn’t be explained away as naive or implausible. Such a response shifts responsibility back onto survivors to deal with trauma, thus implying they were complicit in or provoked abuse. It is vital for the university’s support services to reflect immediately on one of Rape Crisis’ core messages: ‘it was not your fault and you did not deserve this.’

It takes great strength to talk about sexual assault, but this is only heightened by underfunded and inaccessible support systems for survivors. Bravery should not be a requirement for walking down the street, and survivors should not have to perform bravery just because there is no other option.



◀ CHASE CARTER

# Brexit and bureaucracy: my struggles getting a Spanish visa

Maia Walker

Picture this: it's September 18th, 2021. You're a third-year languages student, and your (in-person) university course in Spain started five days ago. You began paying for your accommodation eighteen days ago, and you're supposed to be spending your time learning, meeting people, and exploring a new city. Instead, you're still in England, sitting on your bed, endlessly refreshing your emails with no idea as to what the next year might look like.

Over the past two and a half months, I've spent over nine hundred pounds desperately trying to obtain a visa from the Spanish consulate - to no avail. At every turn there's been an unnecessary obstacle: the three weeks in which my emails were initially ignored; the unmanned telephone line which sent me round in circles; the disarray at the consulate itself; the general inconsistency regarding acceptable insurance; and the scrutiny of so many documents that other European consulates did not request - not to mention the financial demand of such documents. These endless expenses (for legalisations, an ACRO certificate, a medical certificate, extra insurance, translations, as well as the application fee itself) have put a significant dent into my savings. And still, no visa. I have even been in contact with my MP about these difficulties and delays, but his emails to the consulate on my behalf have also been ignored.

Another complication in my fruitless endeavour for a visa has been the discrepancies between the requirements of different European consulates. For example, my friends who applied for a French visa - although they also had stressful experiences - were not expected to gather any of the time-consuming and costly extra documents listed above. As well as this, their applications, in most cases, took no more than 2 weeks to process

and, shockingly, the application fee for my boyfriend's visa was £30, while mine was £174. Various articles from the BBC, the Guardian, and the Independent have specifically criticised the difficulties in acquiring a Spanish visa. So, whilst I am delighted to watch my friends thriving through Instagram stories of impressive landmarks and gorgeous pastries, I can't help but feel dispirited when I look to the corner of my room and catch sight of my own untouched suitcase. The year abroad experience is something that every language student builds up to over years of study; an opportunity for cultural and linguistic immersion which should be a huge, exciting step. Instead, I am plagued by anxiety over my late arrival to the university and, worse still, an underlying dread that this could all have been for nothing - my visa application may ultimately be rejected.

As devastating as this is on a personal level, the ambiguity of the process and the discrepancies between consulates indicate a much larger problem: the lasting uncertainty surrounding travel and movement policies in a post-Brexit

Britain. Whilst Brexit has seldom stimulated clarity (a major tactic of the Leave campaign in 2016 was one of "cultivated ambiguity"), Boris Johnson's approach towards student mobility (much like his regard for student welfare) has been erratic at best. Not only has visa uncertainty left many people stuck in limbo, but Johnson's abandonment of the heavily praised EU Erasmus programme poses further problems. Erasmus championed a policy of reciprocity; British students studied abroad and, in exchange, international students came to UK universities. By contrast, the Turing scheme does not offer provisions for foreign students to study in the UK. This demonstrates a callous disregard for these students' learning opportunities, and for the significance of cultural exchange. As well as this, critics worry that this breach of cooperation will cause international universities to introduce tuition fees for UK year-abroad students, which would significantly escalate costs. And objections to the scheme continue: Hillary Gyebi-Ababio has criticised the government for not "back[ing it] up...

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The year abroad experience is something that every language student builds up to... instead, I am plagued by anxiety  
”



◀ Pixabay/ Mohamed Hassan

with the funding required to support disadvantaged students", and Kate Green has said that the Conservative "rhetoric on the Turing Scheme does not live up to the reality".

These changes have therefore left students, universities, governments, and consulates at odds, with repercussions which may cause irreparable damage. For example, while I am lucky to have been able to delve into my overdraft and receive family support to fund the extortionate visa costs, many lower income students may not have these safety nets. Thus, the year abroad is becoming increasingly inaccessible (both financially, and due to the sheer volume of meticulous paperwork that may be particularly challenging for those with learning difficulties such as dyslexia or ADHD). Not only does this threaten the opportunities of individual students; it also threatens the study and appreciation of different languages and cultures as a whole. Already, the recent rise in machine translators has led to a reduction in the number of students applying for modern language degrees. Now, these new obstructions endanger them further. It has truly been, as described by Nicola Sturgeon, "cultural vandalism" - a thoughtless fracturing of Britain's connection to different cultures and linguistic variety.

Only two years ago, an EU arrangement awarded my friend and me free inter-railing tickets to explore vast expanses of Europe. The contrast between this cultural embrace and today's bureaucratic walls is shocking. I can only hope that the government will recognise the struggles experienced by both UK and foreign students this year, as well as the potential for this to deeply impact cultural diversity on a national level, and that they make some much-needed changes.

# Texas is the rule, not the exception

Megan Byrom

Attacks on reproductive rights are a tradition in the state of Texas. Since the landmark ruling of 'Roe vs Wade', the state has introduced complex legislation in the pursuit of limiting access to abortion. From mandatory ultrasounds and limiting state funding towards reproductive healthcare all the way to legally required yet medically inaccurate "women's rights to know" pamphlets, the last 20 years of Texan legislation has attacked reproductive rights from every angle. But with this new 'heartbeat act', the long fight on abortion has emerged with new tactics; the ability of any party "with vested interest" to sue those aiding and inducing abortions after 6 weeks.

The introduction of such a right has been likened to a witch hunt, as it enables the public to sue those involved for a minimum of \$10,000. Coupled with the bounty available for reporting those implicated and the extreme limitations on who can access reproductive care legally; *abortion is effectively banned across Texas.*

Amongst personal stories of those fighting these repressive laws and comparisons to The Handmaid's tale, the

reality gets lost. Texas is not an exemption in a so-called liberal feminist west, Texas is the rule itself.

Whilst it is easy to depict Texas as a dangerous and regressive outsider, feminists, policymakers, and leaders must confront the reality that reproductive rights remain insecure and continually challenged. The west has long placed itself in opposition to those who would endanger women's rights, utilising feminism as a political and strategic tool. This dichotomy not only ignores the complex global picture of female oppression and liberation but omits the struggles of women inside this 'liberal' order for its own political gain.

If we look internally, the picture shows how events in Texas are a standard rather than an extreme in the current climate. In the UK, it was only in 2020 that widespread access to abortion was legalised. Before this, there was a near-total ban on abortion in Northern Ireland, even in extreme cases. Despite breaching the European Convention on Human Rights, Northern Ireland continued to prosecute those seeking abortions, with such actions hitting the poorest, most vulnerable women. Whilst formal decriminalisation took place last

year, access to abortion in Northern Ireland remains fraught. Services remain dependent on overstretched voluntary sources and access remains ambiguous, with campaigners arguing the DUP are making abortion purposefully difficult to access.

Covid-19 has brought further challenges for reproductive rights and access. For many women living in states with oppressive reproductive laws, their only option was to travel into neighbouring areas where abortion is legal. However, the lack of international travel, expensive PCR tests and isolation periods in the Covid-19 context mean that the ability to seek abortions across their own borders has become an impossibility.

Many governments have used coronavirus measures as a guise to limit and attack access to abortive and reproductive care. Draconian measures in Romania even limited abortion measures by deeming it a 'non-essential service, in which the BBC reported only 11 out of Romania's 280 hospitals were providing abortive services during the peak of the coronavirus crisis. Campaigners argue that this was just another action taken by Romanian officials to phase out

abortion. Other nations such as Slovakia, Italy, and Croatia, all saw the rolling back of services during the pandemic. Whilst some argued it was simply a resource issue, for others, coronavirus became an ally to Europe's right-wing populists and allowed them to expand their powers under the illusion of pandemic measures. In Poland, attempts to pass the 'Stop Abortion' bill were pushed through parliament using expanded powers due to Covid meaning a near-total abortion ban was implemented in early 2021.

The landscape of reproductive rights globally is an unequal one that remains challenged by populist powers, social upheaval and ultra-conservatism. The horrors in Texas appeared to shock much western feminist discourse, citing a regression of women's rights. However, this is not simply a move backwards, but a reflection of the present, in which Texas fits into a global picture where reproductive services remain insecure and inaccessible. Anti-abortion sentiment, rhetoric, and policy is not a rarity as the liberal West would have us believe, but a reality for far too many.

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Our values simply are not theirs - and yet we broadly just accept what they're doing to us without telling them how we feel  
”

# Science

## Want to change the world? Start with your university

*Cambridge SU Ethical Affairs Campaign argues that to combat war, inequality and climate breakdown, we must take the fight to Cambridge University — which is divested, dirty, and in denial*

**W**elcome to Cambridge. It's a strange, and very old place with lots of odd customs and traditions to get your head round. Working out what the University of Cambridge is takes some time and, when it hits you, it's tough. When your home has connections to war crimes and ecocide, motivating yourself to get out of bed can become a near-impossible task. We are writing this not to scare anyone or trigger feelings of powerlessness, but because we want to be honest about the violent realities of the place we live in, and we are hopeful about the community it can become. There's a lot to say and we will only scratch the surface of Cambridge's impact, but once you have a picture of what the University is, it becomes easier to imagine what it could be, and the steps we have

to take to get there.

Let's begin with the University's mission statement: "to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence."

It sounds nice. But we 'contribute to society' in other ways, too. Just turn on the TV and you'll see it. Four million barrels of oil leaking into the Gulf of Mexico? The F16 fighter aircraft bombing occupied Gaza? All those figures saying we're nowhere near on course to meet critical climate targets? You'll find Cambridge in there somewhere, and it won't be pursuing 'education, learning and research'. So what's the common denominator?

Money.

The University of Cambridge is the richest higher education institu-

tion in the UK, where the university and its colleges have consolidated net assets of at least £11.8bn. It is not, despite what many in the university's establishment would tell you, strapped for cash. This capital is how the university primarily 'contributes to society'.

£3.5 billion of the university's endowment sits in the Cambridge University Endowment Fund, which, in 2020, after years of tireless campaigning by student and faculty activists announced that it would be divesting from fossil fuels by 2030 — "responding comprehensively to a pressing environmental and moral need for action", as the Vice-Chancellor put it. At the time of writing, the fund's seventh largest holding at 2.21% is Indraprastha Gas Ltd, a fossil-fuel distributor. It's laughable. Most of the University's climate claims, we hope to show, ultimately amount to hot air.

Whether colleges double up investments in renewable technology or not, they usually do this on a time-

exploitative and polluting industries only when it is 'consistent with the College's income growth objectives'.

The University has made a start — fossil fuel companies have been, in theory, removed from many colleges' investment portfolios. But in practice, there's a lot of work left to be done — most colleges have tried to get away with the bare minimum. In 2020, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign found that the university had amassed £109,820,000 of investments in companies complicit in supporting Israel's violations of international law. Divestment, despite the tireless campaigning of PalSoc, has not touched these investments and ignores the arms industry altogether. Even Jesus College, whose divestments are seen as the 'gold-standard' in institutional climate action, ignored the Jesus College Climate Justice campaign's (JCCJC) recommendations to 'broad-

ly, selfish. PalSoc and others continue to campaign for a broader divestment which takes into account human rights violations perpetrated by the FTSE-listed world wreckers to whom our capital remains committed.

Thirdly, as the JCCJC recommends, we need to think about the ecosystem of divestment. If we're divesting from fossil fuels, but still employing asset-management companies like Schroders - who have an abysmal record of voting against positive climate resolutions at the AGMs of corporations they invest in — we're sending an incomplete message. Finding alternatives to those fuelling environmental catastrophe will be difficult, but, in the meantime, campaigns like Boycott Barclays are sending a message to the big banks

bankrolling climate breakdown, that, like the fossil fuel industry, they should start changing — fast.

Finally, let's remember where our wealth came from. Sixteen colleges are currently cooperating with the Legacies of Slavery Inquiry, an internal inquiry into the university's historical complicity in the slave trade. If, as Jesus College has already admitted, our wealth has been partially accrued through decades of brutal enslavement, then we need to not only acknowledge this, but make reparations. These cannot simply take the form of educational partnerships or other PR-exercises. Writing for Al Jazeera, Mohammed Elnaiem argues that to limit 'reparation' to these image-based academic initiatives would be 'to strip that word of its meaning'. Reparations must be tangible, financial — just as our profiteering from colonial projects was tangible and financial.

This is our history. This is our university. These are our investments. Jesus College's 'bold' divestment plans should be the bare minimum. Climate action, international solidarity, reparations for decades of profiteering from violence and exploitation, all these and more are contingent on getting divestment right. This means thinking beyond divestment to the programme of positive and reparative investment that must follow.

## THE MAYS



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Trinity College sits on an endowment of £1.1b

After years of campaigning, the Cambridge University Endowment Fund of £3.5b will divest from fossil fuels by 2030

frame which matches their institutional ambitions, rather than the urgency of the ecological crisis we face. King's, John's, Christ's and Trinity have all opted for a 2030 divestment deadline, which makes no effort to acknowledge the communities facing the full force of the climate crisis now. Trinity College sits snugly on an endowment worth £1.1 billion and disavows

encompasses the scope of 'divestment' to include the arms industry. Jesus' investments in BAE systems, whose aircraft were used to bomb hospitals in Yemen, remain.

So, what's next? Firstly, we need to ramp up the urgency of divestment. Many colleges still haven't made any attempts to cut their ties with the fossil fuel industry. We have nine years to reduce our emissions by approximately 90% in order to have a chance of mitigating global warming to the 1.5°C rise recommended by the IPCC. Divestment must happen now, not over a period of nine years, or once it's financially viable. These are our make-or-break years.

Secondly, limiting divestment to fossil fuels is reductionist and, ul-

# Raunchy risks and rewards

Deputy Science Editor *Nieve Brydges* explores the psychology behind our relationship with Tinder, considering why getting down and dirty in the digital world may not be as easy as it seems



UNSPASH/FARRINI

As a young person today, it's not uncommon to have partaken in Tinder's high-spirited match-making experiment, to be uncharacteristically charmed by its pleasant jingles and ever-jovial "You've got a match!!!". Especially in the context of unsolicited periods of sexual dormancy ushered in by the pandemic, these brief moments of digital flattery promise to counter feelings of isolation and inadequacy. It's unsurprising, then, that in March 2020, Tinder boasted a record-breaking 3 billion swipes in a single day. Yet this gamified experience hides a sinister format that turns dating into addictive cycles of risk and reward.

Not insignificantly, the rise of internet dating has peaked in a sort of 'sex recession', in which young people are getting frisky less frequently relative to other generations. It's any wonder that, even during a public health crisis (and an age of COVID-induced helicopter parenting), we're still looking to get down and dirty. The blame for our generational paucity of sexual intimacy can be levelled at a range of modern grievances - including (but not limited to) increased porn consumption and more screen time.

However, I am going to explore how dating apps perpetuate this issue. After all, it seems counterintuitive that in an age of Tinder's ever-present commitment to forging us new 'connections', young people are having less sex than previous generations. Who (if anyone) are these apps serving? And if they aren't fulfilling our needs, why do dating apps continue to be used?

Tinder seems, at first glance, to yield endless opportunities for romantic and sexual encounters. The reality, however, is more complicated. Like a child in a candy store, the infinite reel of beach pics, mirror selfies, and the mandatory Cambridge formalwear photo can overwhelm us, negating our ability to choose just one individual. What if the next dashing gowned man grasping champagne bottles outside of King's, proffering

a cheeky "6'3 - if that matters", will be The One? .. Or the next? Spurred on by addictive cycles of risk and reward - not dissimilar to those at work when we engage with slot machines - our brains are hooked on the app regardless of its sometimes empty outcome. It's distressing that the gambler's fallacy, in which individuals make mistaken judgements about the likelihood of positive outcomes, is now driving our romantic and sexual conquests; over 70% of Tinder users have never actually met up with

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The internet's  
promise of 'connec-  
tions' is luring some  
users into  
higher levels of  
depression and  
anxiety  
”

someone from the app. Its popularity soars not because the app is effective, but because we think it might be. Here, the notion that "there's plenty more fish in the sea" becomes a tantalising and malevolent remark on the brain's fervent desire for satisfaction.

This fruitless charade of swiping is not only damaging to those experiencing 'fobo' (fear of a better option), but also to those who are buried under streams of other eligible singles and thus receive little to no attention. Here, the burden usually falls to men. (Heterosexual) men using Tinder receive on average 0.6 matches for every 100 swipes - insultingly few considering that users on the free version of the app are only provided with 100 swipes per day. Hence, users are caught in a sort of luxury trap. Attractive, both demographically and geographically suited singles appear more accessible than ever, but intimacy remains elusive.

In extreme cases, periods of

sexual dormancy experienced by an individual can lead to the convictions that (1) people are not and cannot be attracted to them, and (2) physical intimacy is too elusive to be worth pursuing. The internet phenomenon of the 'incel' (involuntary celibate) is born from these twin assumptions, and the resulting mental health crises of this 'revelation' has dangerous consequences for these - often male - individuals. I should note here that I am (incorrectly) asserting that the heterosexual dating landscape is the norm; queer online dating experiences can be drastically different, if equally damaging. Grindr, for example, is renowned for its prolific sexual encounters, yet such an emphasis on sex appeal and performance can incite 'vicious cycles' of low self-esteem and depressive episodes.

It must be noted that a 'sex recession' should be a cause for concern not because anyone is owed sex or because we should all be having sex all of the time - but because it marks an era in which the internet's perpetual promise of 'connections' is experienced as a digital Siren, luring some users into higher levels of depression and anxiety.

Sex is complicated, and I'd like to stress that less sex is not

necessarily a bad thing. In many cases, choosing to have less sex is a guarantee that the sex you are having is wanted and enjoyable. For example, casual sex has reduced in part because of reduced alcohol consumption by (and greater autonomy of) young women. Dating apps, too, are a mixed bag. Many people swear by swiping as the best way to embark on their 'hot girl summers' or meet people with shared interests; others are merely using

Tinder for 'confidence-boosting procrastination'. However, when the algorithm we're relying on to seek intimacy in this age of isolation seems engineered for our failure, it's high time we recognise its shortcomings. Perhaps the gamble you are taking with that risqué Tinder bio, or ill-considered pickup line could be traded for flirtations that take place outside of platforms that turns our personal wants and needs into parodies of desire.



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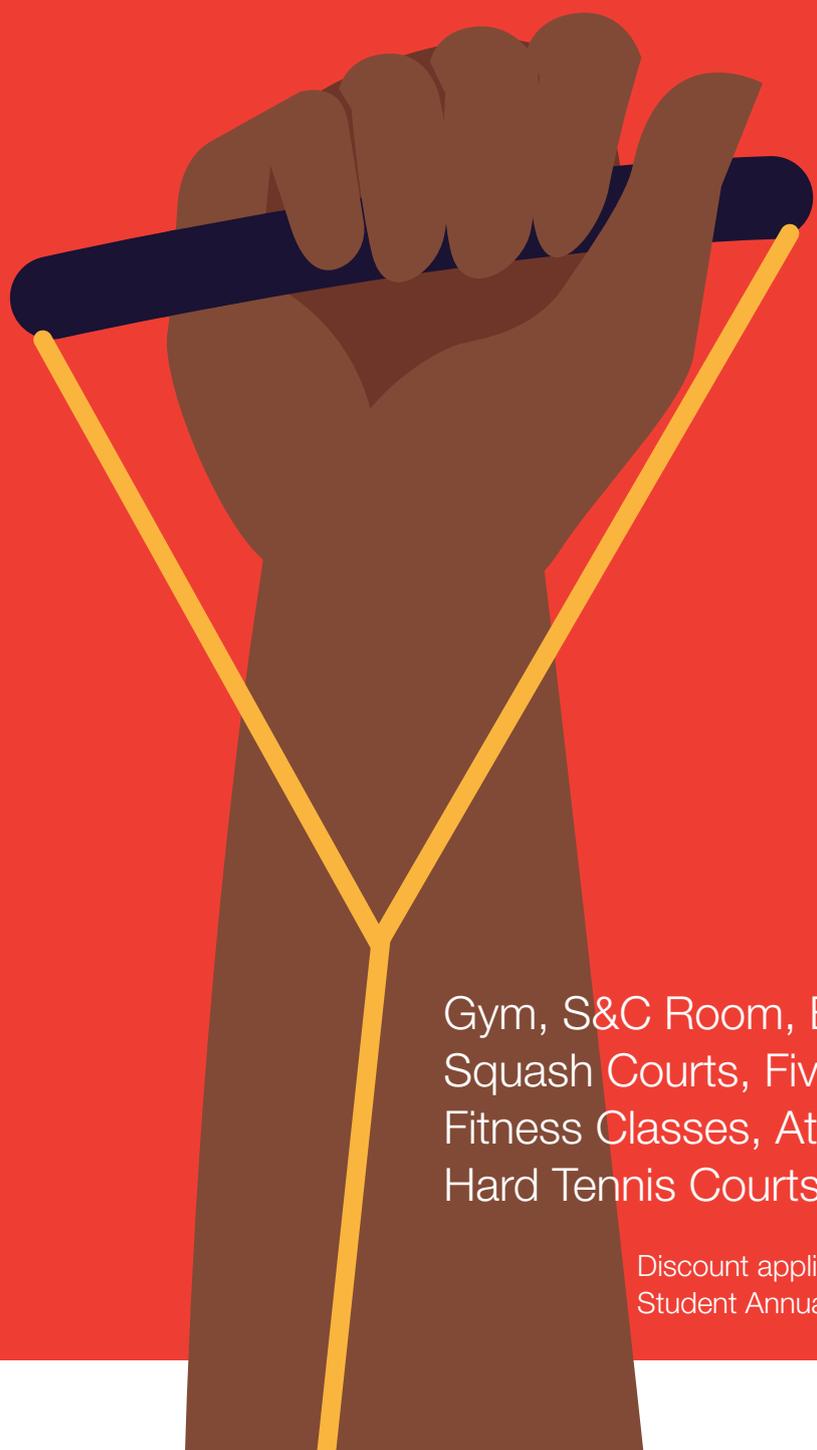
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## Interviews

# Union President Keir Bradwell on voting and access in the society

Editors-in-Chief *Nick Bartlett* and *Isabel Sebode* sit down with Keir Bradwell to discuss the changes being made to the society's election processes, culture, and outreach efforts

“Today I was rung by the President of a country, out of the blue. And I was like, ‘ah, good morning!’” is one of the first things Keir tells us when we ‘meet’ with him over Zoom. He seems excited yet exhausted, perhaps inevitably so after 8 hours of Zoom interviews. Perhaps, too, because this term’s Union President is rarely disconnected. “I used to turn my phone on silent every night before I went to bed. Now I leave it on because I get random calls on and off all the time.” After a stint as Speakers Officer in Lent term, the same Keir who initially “came into the Union with a sense of imposter syndrome,” became President of Cambridge University’s most prestigious student institution.

Presiding over any university society, especially one as large as the Cambridge Union, carries with it a weight of responsibilities, something Keir came to understand very early on. During the pandemic, election rules changed, allowing members to send thousands of messages to students on Facebook to encourage them to vote for a particular candidate online. Non-Union and Union members alike quickly became annoyed, casting the society in a bad light.

This Michaelmas, however, voting procedures have changed – a reform brought about by Debates Officer Sophie West. Keir confirms that “[you’ll] vote by walking into the chamber and by putting a physical slip in a ballot box,” something he suggests is “more enforceable than banning messaging — which used to happen anyway, or secretly at least.” He emphasises that in-person voting will localise the process. “If I message [a stranger] to say, ‘come to the Union to go out of the way to vote for me’, I’m going to get told to sod off.” The change means that the voting system will no longer benefit the candidate most successful at laying siege to students’ inboxes on Facebook, something that previously deterred many from the Union as they settled into Cambridge student politics.

Alongside the voting system, Keir hopes to address another issue which previously deterred some freshers from joining: the membership prices. “This Michaelmas, Keir says, “there’ll be a couple of programs and policies announced soon for those with financial need.” This includes the new Stephen Fry scholarships, which provide fully funded membership for STEM students, in addition to an extensive bursary scheme. Keir and his team acknowledge that “people from disadvantaged backgrounds deserve ways of accessing the Union,” and that “it should never be a barrier that someone can’t afford to join us.”

Given its nature as a political soci-

ety, the Union primarily caters for the interests of Cambridge’s humanities students, which has, at times, caused a sense of exclusivity. When discussing this issue, Keir identifies its self-fulfilling nature. “If you have lots of humanities students, they put on events that humanities students want to see, and so the new intake only then gets that kind of thing on offer.” The Union’s lack of diversity has been a long-standing issue. In recent terms, however, it has been addressed more concretely, beginning with the introduction of an elected Equalities Officer, and followed up by some of the most diverse termcards in Union history.

The current committee intend to retain this momentum, and the Equalities Officer, Zara Salaria, has been pressing on with plans to further diversify both the Union’s speaker and social events. Keir adds that the Union wishes for “speaker invitations to come from people who have come from all over the place and who have all sorts of interests in their subjects.” The easing of government restrictions will help this aspiration, as mass-scale social events at the Union, like the Freshers’ Ball,

resume. With a broader range of events, the Union will hopefully attract more non-humanities students.

Given the bursaries, scholarships, diversified termcard and modified voting practices, the society seems to be moving in a more inclusive and accessible direction. Keir expresses his team’s aspiration to make the Union a place everyone can access.

We learn that Keir’s early experience at Cambridge was instrumental in shaping the way he approaches his position in the Union now. He is clearly amused

“I came into the Union with a sense of imposter syndrome”

as he recalls his own experience of freshers’ week. He smiles as he introduces us to the early Keir, the timid adolescent who wandered into Queens’ College two years ago. “I was so nervous and scared of meeting anyone that I threw up multiple times, stayed in, and then missed all of the first freshers’ activities.” Keir credits the Union for bringing him from “being a complete nervous wreck to slowly coming out of [his] shell.” This encapsulates how Keir wishes to approach the Union: at the end of his tenure, he hopes to “help everyone have a similar kind of experience” to his own.

Before we hit the ‘end meeting’ button on our laptops, we ask Keir who his three speakers would be at the Union, if he had the pick of the bunch. “Dead or alive?” He asks. Either or, we respond. He pulls at his hair, “do you know what’s awful? Every

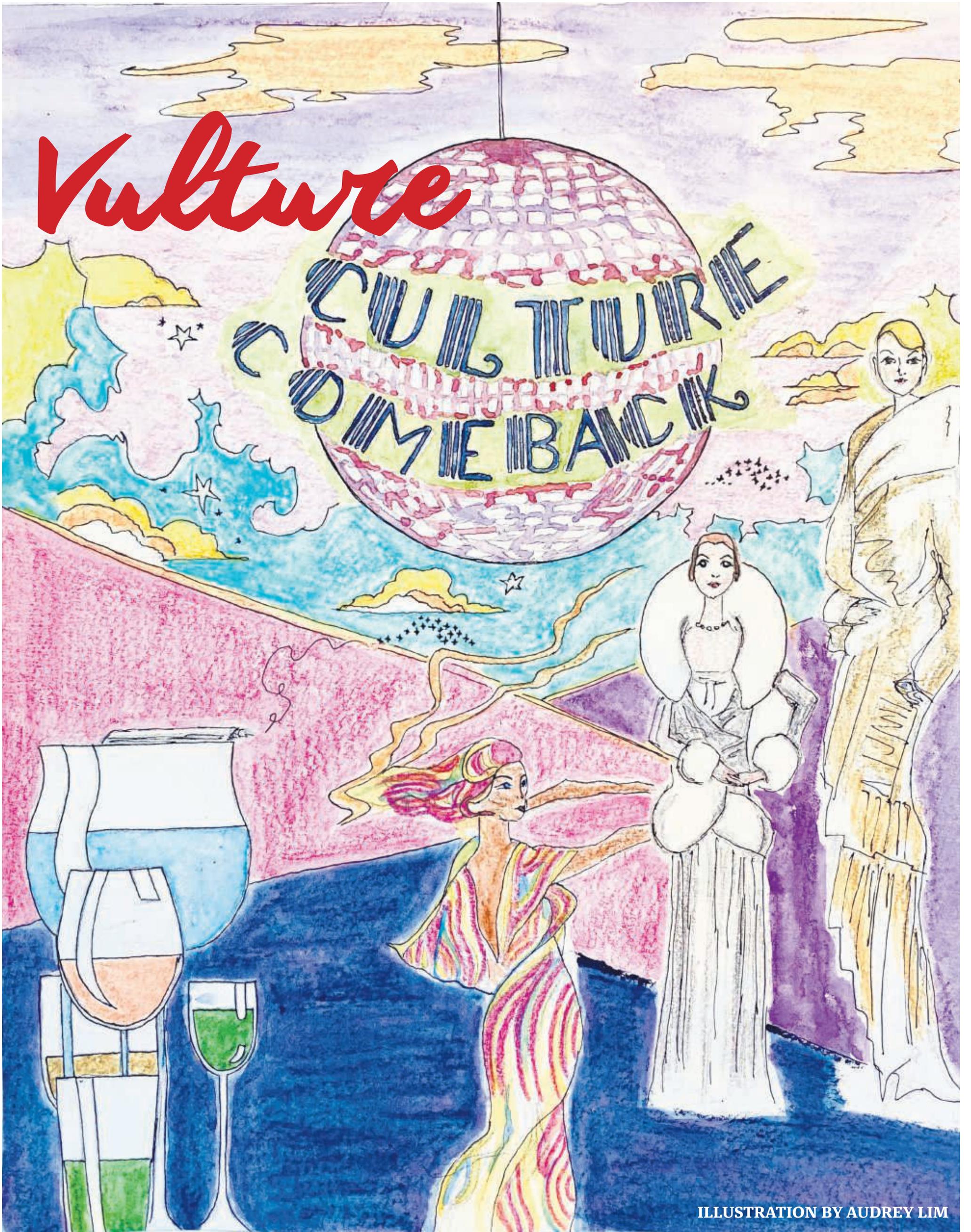
single Union candidate gets told to prepare for this question, and I still don’t know!” We all laugh, before turning the spotlight back on Keir. Acknowledging he has “massively overthought this”, he comes up with three categories and walks us through them step-by-step. A few minutes after our interview ends, we receive a message: “Kate Bush, Richard Ayoade, David Attenborough”. Let’s see who will eventually make the stage.

“It should never be a barrier that someone can’t afford to join us”



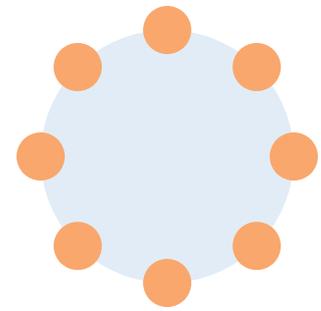
◀ Keir Bradwell, Michaelmas President of the Cambridge Union (PHOEBE PICKERING)

# Vulture



# Lifestyle

## Fabulous Freshers



*Immy Rowe shares some advice on how to overcome anxiety and make the most of your time as a fresher*

**A**s a fresher – someone anxiously awaiting and imagining the journey they are about to embark on at a world-renowned university – it is relatively easy to fall into the trap of thinking that socially, Cambridge may not be simple to navigate. Much like the class of 2021, the 2020 cohort of students were faced with multiple lockdowns before and during their initial moments at Cambridge. However, the truth is that despite these challenges, many incredibly resilient friendships have been forged.



Having interviewed peers from the 2020 cohort, I have collated a smorgasbord of tips and tricks for those of you embarking on your new adventure at Cambridge. This covers advice from how to deal with feelings of social anxiety, to ways you can reach out. Hopefully this amalgamation of knowledge proves useful and comforting for our 'fabulous freshers'.

### 1. Getting comfortable

For many of you, move-in day will conjure a mixture of emotions. It is really important that at this time you create a calm and safe space within your room. Make it somewhere you are happy to be in and rest in, especially within the first few days. Let yourself acclimatise. Decorate your room with things that you love, which are familiar and comforting to you. Maybe integrate some soft lighting, like a rock salt lamp, and make sure your bed is comfortable (I suggest getting a mattress topper when – or before – you arrive).

### 2. Getting un-comfortable

*'I met loads of friends when I started rowing and when concerts started up again.'*

Make sure you check out the fresher's fair and try to join a few societies. Whether you like group sports, gaming, music or dance, societies are a great way to meet people. Truthfully, it's something that a lot of the 2020 cohort are still working on and I can personally understand how intimidating it is to put yourself in a vulnerable situation like that. However, it is incredibly important to remember that almost everyone there is just as self-conscious and vulnerable as you are. Get out of your head and try to enjoy yourself!

### 3. Recharge

*'Make sure you definitely have a bit of time to yourself each day, even if it's only an hour*

“

*A year down the line I can confidently say that I am the happiest I have ever been*

”

or so.'

Don't socially extend yourself to the detriment of your own mental resilience. Whilst it is incredibly exciting to meet new people, I noticed that forcing myself to stay up with my new friends until the early hours of the morning was not great for me or my social stamina. It is not selfish to need time to yourself. Many introverts recharge when they are on their own. In a rather unorthodox move, I used to take half-hour breathers during get-togethers, just to go on my phone or listen to music. This meant I could re-join my group of friends without feeling such a heavy sense of social fatigue.

Another hack for recharging is to do some low energy activities with your friends. For me this involved meeting up with one of my

close friends, when we were both tired but wanted some company. Often we just had fun watching some non-cerebral TV – favourites of which include *Come Dine with Me* and *Bake off!* This enables you to maintain a friendship by spending quality time together, but also does not require too much effort – introvert heaven! One of the great things about Cambridge is that you might find some of your best times going to the buttery with people or grabbing a coffee as a study break.

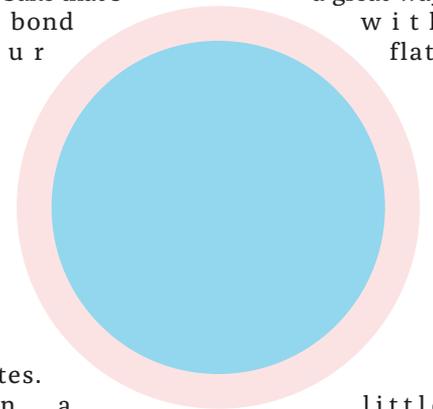
### 4. Reach out

On our first night together, my corridor played card games such as *Cards Against Humanity*. It was incredibly beneficial to how we bonded as friends and not just flatmates.

It smoothed over the awkwardness of those first meetings without having to panic and search for things to talk about. Plus, it is a really good laugh!

*'My mum says bring hot chocolate to halls'*

There is nothing like a hot drink to help entice people to spend time with you. Bring hot chocolate and on a particularly miserable day make a big batch and hope it lures your corridor to the gyp! In all seriousness if you can bake that's a great way to bond with your flat-



mates.

Plan a little afternoon tea, or, like my corridor did, make a communal cake every week and everyone will be your BFF.

Like many students, I had a huge amount of anxiety associated with the prospect of making friends at university, as I did not have the easiest time trying to do the same at school. A year down the line I can confidently say that I am the happiest I have ever been. At Cambridge I have met incredible, like-minded people, who truly care and are extremely supportive. My main takeaway, and my advice to new students, would be to put yourself out there. Much like the saying 'the phone works both ways' you cannot always expect friends to come to you. I acknowledge that this is much easier said than done. It is something that many people, myself included, struggle with. However, if you make the effort with people, they will do the same back. Sometimes, all it takes is simple coffee date for a beautiful friendship to form.

### A Short Glossary of Cambridge-isms:

- BNOC** – Big Name On Campus – an infamous individual who has become a household name.
- Bop** – The Cambridge equivalent of a year 6 disco.
- Buttery** – Where you can grab some hassle-free food.
- DoS** – Director of Studies.
- Gyp** – Cambridge slang for Kitchen.
- Pidge** – Pidgeon Hole.
- Plodge** – Porter's Lodge, normally at the front of college, often frequented in the early hours of the morning when you've locked your key card in your room.
- Mainsbury's** – Sidney Street Sainsbury's (in town).
- Farawainsbury's** – Eddington Sainsburys (in a parallel universe).

◀ ILLUSTRATION BY ODESSA CHITTY



# AskVulture: How do I balance all of my commitments?

“How can I find a balance between being involved in lots of societies, trying new things, and my degree; How do I deal with imposter syndrome within societies?”



Our AskVulture team answers...  
**Amy:** Establishing balance is a constant process of trial and error: before I advise you on how to establish that balance, it is important to remember that you are not always going to get everything right the first time around, and to be at peace with that.

You learn the most about yourself from experiences, from making mistakes, and trying new things - love them or hate them. Avoiding seizing opportunities in fear of disrupting the balance between academics and additional commitments, or essay crises induced by compulsively saying yes to every society, are part of this learning process. You won't find the limits of your time management skills until you meet them!

The short Cambridge terms, crammed with academic and social activities and little time between each essay, cultivates the idea that we must rush to complete everything at its earliest opportunity. This is not a helpful idea to apply to commitments outside of our degree: over three or four years, nine or twelve terms, there is plenty of time to both foster long-term skills and to try something new for a term. One of the wonderful things about Cambridge is the wealth of opportunities, meaning you don't need to say yes straight

“Take a step back when things go awry, and to balance your yeses with nos”

away, but can defer an opportunity to another term or year.

Conversely, it is important to leave space in your schedule for yourself, or to use as a buffer in the face of the unexpected. As important as it is to try new things, busying yourself with lots of commitments should be complemented with the ability to vocalise your need to take a step back when things go awry, and

to balance your yeses with nos, too.

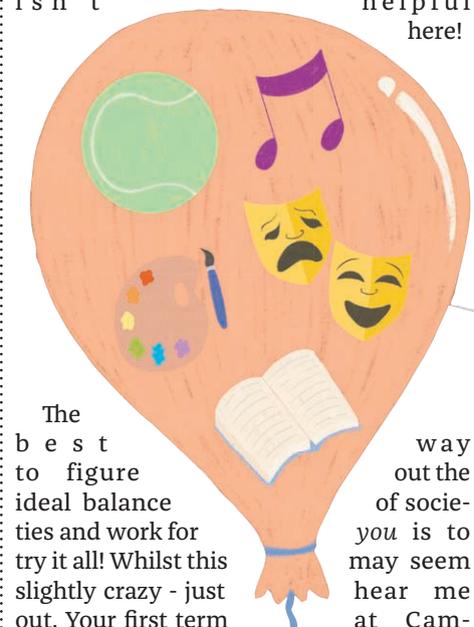
**Rosina:** A little forward planning goes a long way. Your first encounter with the delectable assortment of societies and activities that Cambridge has to offer doesn't have to be at the Freshers' Fair. Why not do some research into the societies you think you might be interested in before term even begins and make a list of the things you'd like to try? Give yourself a clearer idea of the activities that you're going to be balancing alongside your degree. You may have to be a little strict with yourself: ask yourself why you want to be involved in these societies, and whether there are any that you'd like to prioritise; it might even be a good idea to put a limit on the number of things that you're going to get involved with each term.

Regular readers of AskVulture will know that I firmly subscribe to the *carpe diem*-mentality, and may be as shocked as I am to find myself telling you that there will always be another chance, another play to audition for, another committee to join. Each term can offer you fresh delights to sample and this is something that you can really make the most of in first year. Take the time to try different things and figure out the best way for you to create balance between your academic and extra-curricular pastimes. The most useful thing you can do for yourself is to create the possibility of involvement: join that Facebook group, sign up to that mailing list, go to that meeting. That way, when the right time to start a new activity comes along, you'll know what options are available.

Of course, creating these opportunities for yourself is the easy part, then you have to summon up the courage to seize them. While this may seem daunting at first, you will grow in confidence with every attempt to put yourself out there, whether you feel able to do so in week one, week seven, or even second term. It can take a long time to realise the ambitions which we make for ourselves before experiencing the realities of university life, but I can assure you that your persistence and patience will pay off.

**Clemmie:** First off: don't stress! You have worked incredibly hard to get here - you should be feeling proud and permit yourself to enjoy yourself before worrying about the after-effects of seizing opportunities.

Taking on too many extracurricular activities is a classic sign of a Cambridge student and you are certainly not alone; finding the right balance is something that everyone struggles with, especially given the number of opportunities here, and is also something very personal - comparison is n't helpful here!



bridge is about adjusting to living here - use this time to work out how much you can realistically take on in the future and to find out which societies you actually enjoy. Then, in the future, you can spend your time on doing the things you know you really love rather than feeling like you might be missing out on something.

When faced with others' talents and skills in a new environment, you've got to go in with a positive attitude. Even the most talented people were newbies once, and had to learn and make mistakes. Although it is difficult to not instantly be the best, patience is key.

Also, there are plenty of societies in Cambridge that welcome beginners (where you won't be alone) so don't let the imposter syndrome keep you from being a part of Cambridge's incredible arts community. There are so many opportunities here and, in my experience, almost everyone is super supportive and will only help you to improve - go out and make the most of that!

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Foreword by Michael Holding

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# Arts

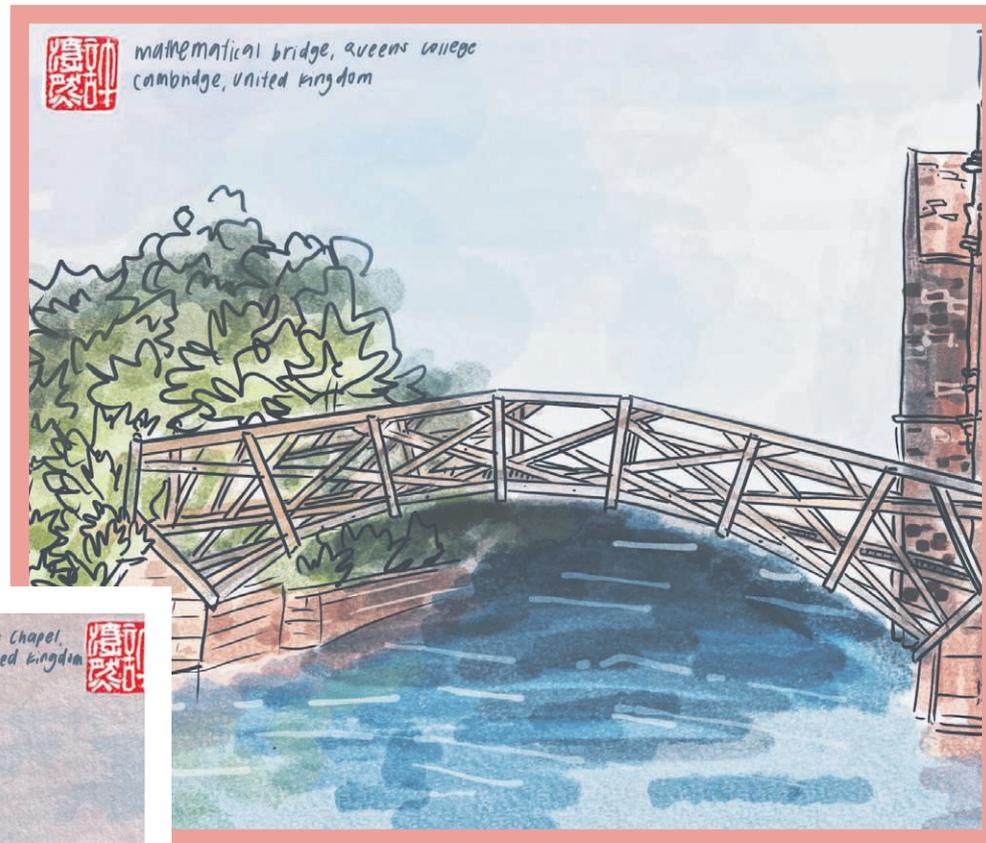
## Around Cambridge in 10 Days

The **Arts** team give you a run down of their top culture picks right on time for the start of term

There's so many things of cultural significance in Cambridge that it can be overwhelming. Whether you're a fourth-year or a fresher, the Arts team are here to help and have compiled some of their favourite places to visit in and around the city.

### 1. The Fitzwilliam Museum

This first-time tourist's favourite is popular for good reason. Full of intriguing artefacts, ranging from Greek ruins to Renaissance paintings, the Fitzwilliam is always worth a visit. Frequently holding exhibitions and even outdoor theatre, it's somewhere a stone's throw away from town which is also accessible — offering free entry to all.



lection of stained-glass works, ranging from biblical medieval windows to modern takes on various social issues.

### 5. Cambridge University Botanic Gardens

The Botanic Gardens are extremely versatile; they offer beautiful walks and scenery all year round, and its various greenhouses display a wide variety of botanic life, including tropical plants and its very own fern room. A welcome break from intensive study, it is the perfect place to relax and learn more about nature.

### 6. College Landmarks (Mathematical Bridge, Bridge of Sighs, Corpus Clock)

You don't have to go beyond the university to find interesting landmarks. Why not spend the day visiting every college, and noting the different styles of architecture that you find? There are also some other striking things to see in town, including Queens' Mathematical Bridge, St. John's Bridge of Sighs (visible via punt!) and the kind-of-terrifying Corpus Clock!

### 7. St Mary's Church

Why not actually visit the place you are somehow legally required to live within three miles of? It's just as striking on the outside as it is on the inside. On occasion, you can receive a tour and, for a fee, reach the top of the church for some breathtaking views of Cambridge. Check it out!

### 8. Bookshops (Heffers, Waterstones, The Haunted Bookshop, The University Bookshop, Amnesty Bookshop)

With so many notable authors among Cambridge's alumni, it comes as no surprise that the city is also home to a number of great bookshops. Whether you prefer somewhere with a cosy corner you can nestle into with your newly-bought tome, or somewhere old and haunted, with a good layer of dust on the shelves, you're sure to find the perfect bookshop to while away the hours!

### 9. Anglesey Abbey

This gorgeous National Trust property lies just a short bus ride outside of Cambridge. The house, built in a Jacobean style, dates back to the start of the 17th century and boasts some truly beautiful gardens. There's also an outdoor cafe with a great cake selection, making it a lovely place to take a day out of an intense term.

### 10. Wren Library

The Wren Library is one of the most beautiful buildings along the Cam, (it's always my favourite view on a punt ride!), but why not go and have a look inside? Located in the middle of Trinity College, with huge glass windows to let in lots of natural light, the library is home to original manuscripts from Isaac Newton and A.A. Milne.



### 3. Anthropology & Archeology Museum

For culture, the Anthropology and Archeology Museum —located in the centre of town — is a must-visit. Small but striking, collections have both a focus on Cambridge as well as the wider world. It has recently

started work on decolonising its collections, and there are explicit details on how many of the artefacts on display were 'acquired' / stolen.

### 4. Ely Cathedral & the Stained-Glass Museum

A short train ride away from Cambridge lies Ely, a beautiful town home to an immense and intricate cathedral, dating back to AD 672. Aside from its stunning external and internal views, it is also home to an impressive col-



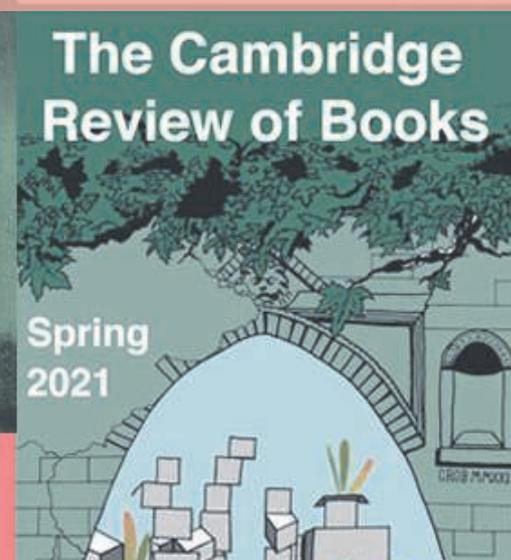
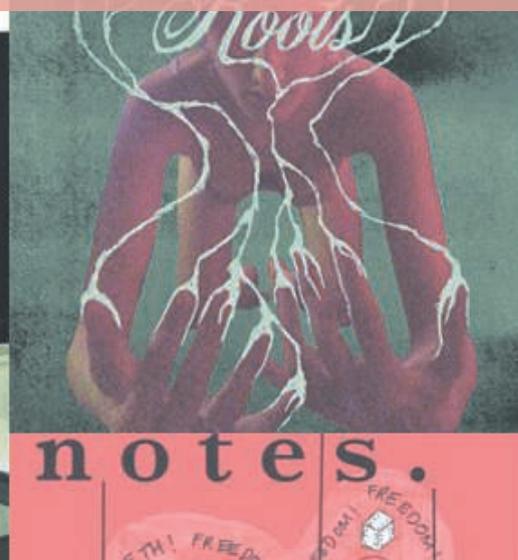
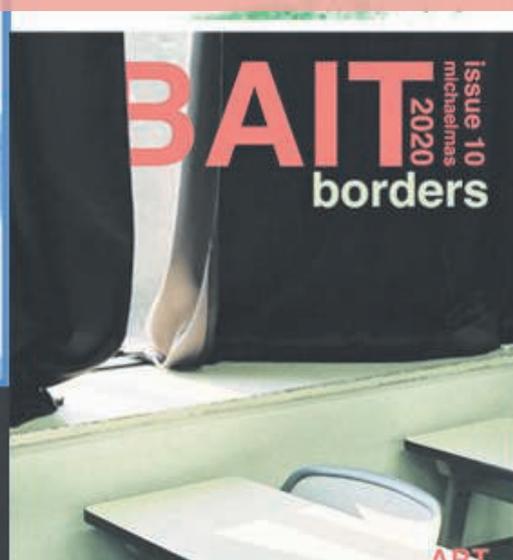
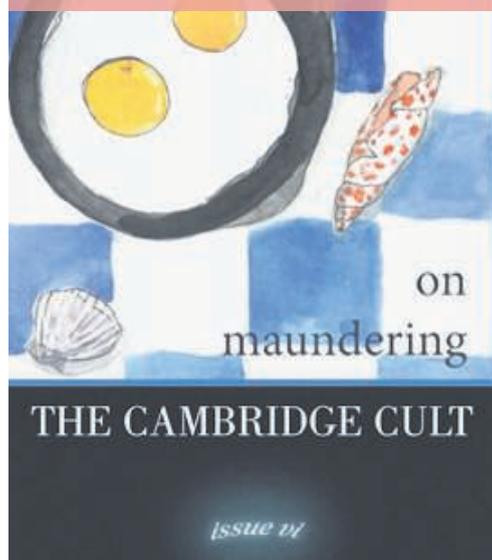
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There's so many things of cultural significance in Cambridge that it can be overwhelming  
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### 2. Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard is a fascinating place, consisting of multiple galleries and originating from a private collection. They have collections of art from painters such as David Jones and sculptors like Barbara Hepworth, with space for topical exhibitions as well.

# The Cambridge Zine: Reclaiming Space and Place

**Margherita Volpato** explores the zine scene in Cambridge, reflecting on how words can both encapsulate and help us navigate the student experience



**W**e've all been there. You move to a new town, or (even more impressively) a new country, and suddenly you become aware of yourself in a 3D sense. You're no longer just a voice inside your own head, but instead an actual living-breathing human who moves inside a place. And, this acknowledgment brings you to the full-frontal realisation that you don't know much about this place aside from what you might have seen online or in a super-packed self-guided open day (which was probably a rare occurrence for those incoming freshers — thanks Covid).

“

*Here is a space, where as a writer, you can find a voice devoid of definition, where your identity can exist in, and simultaneously reject, its place*

”

Your place in this new world, where suddenly you might find yourself defined by what hobbies you chose to take on or by what college you go to, becomes hyper-linked to Cambridge, itself, as a place. The very language we use to navigate our university experience links us inextricably to place, setting, and time. It's very hard to escape, but also quite challenging to enter smoothly. One might feel a shift in identity, and I don't mean imposter-syndrome (although perhaps that too) when

faced with this new bubble.

And yet, this is not entirely true. Cambridge might seem like an all-consuming place. The history, the expectations, the lingo, the hustle-and-bustle; but, there is a way to reclaim it, and it begins with language itself. When I first arrived at Cambridge, the only writing I did was in my journal. Everything else, especially *Varsity*, seemed like a daunting, out-of-my-league place because I saw all these other publications as being defined by Cambridge, the university and its brilliant students. But in reality, most of these publications would resent this, and you might not realise until you look closer. In particular, the Cambridge (maga-)zine phenomenon — an unnecessary title wholly of my own invention, but one that I hope you'll embrace (if only to humour me).

Around the world, I would argue magazines are going out of fashion. Aside from the biggest publications (and even those have converted a large chunk of their content to digital platforms), many small magazines have died out. The physicality of a written publication in your hand is no longer needed to connect with those who write in it. Cambridge students disagree. The zine, another Cambridge-specific term, thrives. There are new publications termly, and new ones being created all the time to fill gaps in audience, or voice, or interest. They reclaim the language of Cambridge, and convert it from a place to a space, where one's language travels, paradoxically free of place and yet held infinitely on a piece of paper. These spaces are entangled, ever-changing, always advancing because they are filled by voices of students who understand that Cambridge is more than a place, and should be defined by more than the language that we, its students, use to describe it.

Here is a space, where as a writer, you can

find a voice devoid of definition, where your identity can exist in, and simultaneously reject, its place. These Cambridge zines not only redefine language, but its medium as well. Some exist in a purely digital form, the true definition of place-less, whereas others travel

“

*The very language we use to navigate our university experience links us inextricably to place, setting, and time*

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by print and are hard to get your hands on. They all embrace their ephemerality, aware that it is not that one edition of their zine which matters, but the continuity of the tradition of displacement. Our zines will only continue to thrive as they continue to create new spaces, filling voids with voices and thoughts.

For those students wishing to pursue writing, these zines could provide the starting point to your discovery as an author, journalist or critic. To readers, be greedy and absorb all that these students have to say. Never has a place such as Cambridge been host to so many spaces of writing. From *BAIT*, to *Notes*, to *The Cambridge Cult*, there's everything you could ever wish to explore. Some use funds to support local, or in-

ternational, charities. Some provide spaces for underrepresented voices, some represent student writing in foreign languages and all explore the importance of individuality and identity. And if you can't find what you're looking for, you must create that space. For the good of the rest of us readers, dying to explore every space imaginable.

So if you're looking to get started in the zine scene, as well as heading to the Freshers Fair, have a look at the Cambridge Arts Facebook page. It itself is a space, a community where all the zine committees, and other arts societies (from dance or music to photography and film) join. It would be fruitless to include a comprehensive list of zines here; indeed, it would defy the whole point of this article. The zine scene itself cannot be captured entirely in writing, because it, itself, is an ever-changing space. All I can do is direct you on your journey, and hope you find a couple of destinations, throughout your time at Cambridge, where you will both read and write, and escape to find solace in spaces previously unknown.

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# Fashion

## In Conversation with Otamere

### Guobadia

Fashion Editor *Muhammad Syed* sits down with writer Otamere Guobadia to discuss literature, fashion, and how they serve as guiding philosophies for life

**W**hen I first came across Otamere's work, his writing struck me as sentimental yet analytical. His articles read like academic essays, albeit ones that were accessible but still flowery and poetic.

of myself that feels magnified, confident and complete. It triggers a power within me that was latent."

After stints in both the fashion and music industry, Otamere returned to writing, "the great love and salvation of his life," and has not looked back since.

The rest of our

tions imposed on women. After all, Otamere perceptively asks, "what is literature if not a means to set the world to rights, the world you cannot have?"

This focus on aesthetics, entangled in the books that he mentions and the clothes that he wears, informs the way he approaches art. His love for dandy-ish, princely clothing is reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's subversive wardrobe, who I safely assume approves of Otamere's fashion. The novels he cites — *The Great Gatsby*, *Tender*

shouldn't I? I want to fawn over things and people. That will always be my self-appointed role."

Indeed, it is a role which he lives up to. I ask him about his favourite creatives, many of whom he considers as friends, which he recites without hesitation: Aidan Zamiri ("fucking dreamscape"), Tom Rasmussen ("the most talented person he knows"), Ib Kamara ("a visionary"), Alexander Pillet ("fiercely analytical and passion-

*"Fashion produces a version of myself that feels magnified, confident and complete. It triggers a power within me that was latent."*

proceeded to form two suppositions: the first was that he read *Law* and the second was that he went to Oxbridge. A quick Google search later and both my assumptions were proven correct.

In an age of multi-hyphenates, there are few who embody the term better than Otamere. He is first and foremost a writer, a web show host, a queer activist, a fashion critic, a lover (not a fighter). He epitomises what it means to straddle the fields of fashion, pop culture, queerness, race, and art.

Otamere's entry into the fashion industry ended as soon as it began. Wide-eyed and hopeful, he entered the hallowed fashion cupboard of *InStyle* magazine as a fresh Law graduate from Oxford. In a hilariously brilliant piece for *WePresent* (that I implore any fashion hopeful to read), he writes about his six-month stint living the "Fashion Fairytale." Where famed shows like *Ugly Betty* and *The Devil Wears Prada* sold idealised versions of the fashion cupboard, the stark reality was that it was "a small, windowless box." It was anything but glamorous.

"I think everyone knows the fashion industry is brutal but I guess that is part of the appeal. It draws people in. The risks are exciting but the rewards can be so great that people want to embark on treacherous odysseys. They want to be transformed in the end and that's what fashion promises people," he explains. Though his qualms about the industry persist, his everlasting love for fashion remains. He counts Kimberly Ann Hart as the Pink Ranger (who he wrote about extensively for *i-D*) and Lady Penelope in *Thunderbirds* as shaping his formative memories of fashion. They served as an entry point, he says, into a love of pink that he has not been able to shake off to this day. As for his favourite designers, Palomo Spain and Mateo Velasquez immediately come to mind. The brands, which both share an ethos to create gender-neutral clothing, have visualised his fantasies even before he has understood them himself. "Fashion produces a version

conversation is about literature just as much as it is about fashion, gesturing to how the two intersect. He jokes about being "a trite soft boy" and disarmingly admits that his favourite books are written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Oscar Wilde, and Virginia Woolf. When discussing the latter, he speaks with greater exuberance. Otamere describes Woolf as a "visionary" who managed to "construct a gender-bending, eternally relevant, fluid character to vicariously live out and speak her love at a time she could not." Her 1928 classic *Orlando* has been described as the most important love letter in literature, a kind of literary justice free from the shackles of economic and social limita-

*Is The Night, Call Me By Your Name* — are beautifully-written pieces of prose

that verge on being poetry. They are melodic, rich with fixated on writing. many people who find me saccharine and find my writing cloying", he admits. "And perhaps, they are right. My writing is just be engaging in hagiography but why

ate"), Pam Boy ("ridiculous and insane"), Shon Faye ("who will revolutionise the conversation on transness"). As an important member of the creative scene in London with a powerful voice and loyal following, Otamere is a fierce supporter of his community. The kind of friend everybody wants in their corner, cheering them on from the bleachers. I imagine the creative scene to be full of bright young things, akin to the Bloomsbury group of which Woolf was a member. Otamere, however, is quick to correct me by conceding that "it can be cliquey but there is a great deal of specialness and vibrance within the people."

For Otamere, it seems that all roads lead to his literary heroes. He dresses like Wilde, writes like Fitzgerald, and shares similar thinking to Woolf. But beyond this, he has a tendency to romanticise the present and look back on the past with rose-tinted glasses because, as previously claimed, he is a lover (not a fighter). It is a philosophy for life which he practices but does not promulgate. He recalls his time at Oxford and the fashion industry as periods marred with many difficulties. However, the trials and tribulations he faced were dulled by formative moments that shaped him into some of who he is now.

As our interview draws to a close, I ask him what advice he would give his 18-year-old self. He sighs, takes a pause, and wistfully says: "remember that you have value and are capable. Always continue to fight and reach for something beyond yourself. Also, wear more blush." His concluding remarks deliver a manifesto to live by, perhaps something we should all get behind. If Woolf could read this, I imagine she would agree.



# An ode to the tote

In response to the *New York Times*' recent article, the *Varsity* team pays homage to their favourite totes

The cotton tote bag has become a form of social currency. Think about the girl in flared jeans, a white tee, and an oversized coat strutting down King's Parade. She is cool (no doubt) and carefree. But add a tote from the Met, or one from Shakespeare and Co. and instantly, her status is elevated. Does she live in New York or Paris, or did she go on holiday there? Does she study art history?

The bag raises questions about the wearer, keeps us intrigued without giving away too much. It serves as a subtle nod to the places they have visited and the shops they frequent, with a hint of understated elegance. Of course, the cotton tote was also thought to be sustainable. That is, until now.

In an explosive piece, the *New York Times* shattered the hearts of many when uncovering the environmental impact of cotton totes. To offset its carbon footprint, studies show that each bag needs to be used 20,000 times. So in honour of cherishing the totes that are already in our closet, the *Varsity* team have rallied together to pay homage to our favourite type of bag.



Isabel Sebode, *Varsity* Editor-in-Chief

Like many people nowadays, I wear tote bags every day and own quite the collection by now. One is from the Museum of the History of Medicine in Berlin, one from the Dior exhibition in Granville, one I just randomly found on the street. Yet, my favourite one by far is one I got printed on Redbubble, with a photograph taken by my best friend on it. On it you can see the broken LED lights outside a strip club in Soho. What I love about the bag is the feminist message that the image projects: ironically so, given the actual location it was taken from. Even more I love the fact that my best friend took the picture — I can be certain that almost no one else has this bag (although more people should!).

Margherita Volpato, *Vulture* Deputy Editor

They say the best things in life are free. Well, it was certainly the case for me and my trusty tote bag, which I have scrupulously used unscrupulously, the permanent stains and marks on its surface signs of its constant employment. I don't actually remember how it first landed in my hands. I know that, at some point, it had ended up in the cupboard under the stairs and I'd decided that it was



plain enough to be passed off as somewhat effortlessly chic. It has since been my constant companion in Cambridge and elsewhere — it has even made it to the Spanish coast this year, where it has garnered many more stains (their permanent status yet to be confirmed) being my trusty beach bag. My mum still berates me for using it, especially now that it has seen better days. But I find myself adversely against the idea of throwing it away, or, even worse, passing it on to someone else. It's a small rebellious act, against my mother, and perhaps fashion etiquette, that one's accessories need to reflect some sort of trend (and potentially be stainless) to look good and feel comfortable. I've embraced the tote-mania full heartedly, but very loyally. It is now a companion, not an accessory which I plan to quit using once this mania trend is over.



Olivia Rhodes, Fashion Editor

Before arriving in Cambridge as a fresher last year, I had a mental image of myself floating on the autumn breeze from library to coffee shop to one Cambridge architectural beauty after another. But required for all these excursions, of course, would be a book, coffee cup, four lip products, my laptop, wallet, keys, probably another book — and that would be packing light, alongside your standard essentials. Something practical and outfit-complementing was necessary, so into service came my Urban Outfitters tote bought specifically for the purpose. Now, this bag has come with me everywhere, at its bottom crumpled receipts from lunch with various

combinations of my favourite people and crystals from Cornish cliffs I explored this summer. Despite being the most virulent loather of mess and unnecessary clutter, I leave those mementos in there. They, like the memories that accompany them, are part of my bag.



Eliane Bedu, Fashion Columnist

I believe that tote bags have wrongly become stereotypical of Humanities students who take themselves way too seriously as they read Jane Austen in a park, carrying totes bearing political slogans or abstract art representations. I obviously have nothing against those, on the contrary. But, in an attempt to mock these stereotypes, I decided to buy the cheugiest tote bag I could find. This was back in 2018 in London, and I ended up buying a commemorative tote bag of Harry and Meghan's wedding. How ironic is it now? Megxit having been well consummated, the tote has become my favourite one, being now funnier than ever.



Eleanor Antoniou, Fashion Columnist

I adore my Daunt Books tote; I know that so many Londoners have this bag, but that somehow adds to the charm because it means that it reminds me of my love for London. Instead of going abroad this summer, I made the most of living next door to the city, and took my tote on every trip: perfectly sized and matching with everything. My summer memories are all attached to this bag: picnics in the park, art galleries, sunsets, lavender fields and reuniting with my friends from home. Collected at

the bottom are the remnants of my summer, memories I don't want to clear out or forget, held together in the canvas, a tote now forever full of happiness and summer sunshine.



Eva Morris, Fashion Columnist

My favourite tote is a small tote from Undercover. From their spring-summer 2009 collection, it has a short description of 'Graces' on the inside and a depiction of these creatures in an image labelled 'The Blooming Hut' on the outside. This tote accompanied me on many a trip to 6th form. As it is a smaller tote, I only ever took it if there was no P.E., as I needed less space, and so accompanies many a good memory escaping the sweaty hell that is physical exertion. I also love it as it is one of the many items in my wardrobe which my twin brother recommended I get first, as he had spotted it on Ebay, and every time I use it it's a reminder of how much my wardrobe isn't just shaped by me.



Anna Chan, Fashion Contributor

I got this tote bag at the MOMA store in Tokyo a few years ago (I'm a poser who'd never actually been to MOMA but was obsessed with their YouTube channel). I love the simplicity of the design subtly perverted by the ants making up the black font, but the clincher was the fact that ants were crawling around and up the handle. Its fabric is also thicker than the typical tote. I always cradle it on my lap when I sit on the subway, and stuff it into a round mass full of my essentials to go out for a study session.

# Music

## The definitive soundtrack to your Freshers' Week

Music Editors *Maddy Fisher* and *Matthew Cavallini* curate a playlist with the perfect song for every moment of your Freshers' Week, from the drive there, to your weekly shopping trip

**W**ith all the timetabled fun, tepid nightclubbing, and name/subject/hometown reciting of Freshers' Week, we don't blame you if you don't have the time to expertly curate a playlist for your first week at Cambridge. Fortunately, your humble music editors are here to provide you with a custom soundtrack to accompany all the peculiar elements of this week! Something to keep the music flowing, even when conversation is decidedly not.

### The song to listen to whilst driving to Cambridge

*Maddy: The Cranberries - "Linger"*

Driving up to Cambridge with your parents in the front seat requires a playlist that suits a range of ages and tastes. Luckily, I feel like "Linger" is universally adored and has that delicious hit of nostalgia (especially if you're Irish, I guess?) to accompany the move from your hometown.

*Matthew: Rina Sawayama - "Paradisim"*

What better way to start your Cambridge experience than by listening to inarguably Cambridge's best alumna, Rina Sawayama? Assuming you're a bundle of nerves like I was, this care-free anthem is the perfect song to help you lose your inhibitions and just enjoy the moment. When Rina sings "living my best life, driving," it's a cue for you to join her in experiencing that joy.

### The song to play in your room to make other freshers think you're cool

*Maddy: Cocteau Twins - "Bluebeard"*

Upon musing on this prompt, I thought to myself, "If I walked past someone's room and they were listening to Cocteau Twins, or

Kate Bush, or any burgeoning South London post-punk band, I would think they gave off the coolest vibes," before tragically realising I was just describing the music I listen to. Perhaps becoming Music Editor has inflated the perception of my music taste, perhaps I have always been like this, perhaps I am turning into the male manipulator music snob I always feared. Anyways, this Cocteau Twins track is sublime and dreamy, perfect to fill the walls of any cool girl's uni room.

*Matthew: C. Tangana, Ninõ de Elche & La Húngara - "Tú me dejaste de querer"*

I think that growing up in a country where popular music is almost entirely in our home language has somehow made me feel that "I explore the music of other countries" is an adequate substitute for a personality. With that being said, the nu-flamenco music of C. Tangana makes for the perfect background music that is both relaxing enough to casually vibe to, yet interesting enough that any passerby should think "how mysterious and distinctive this person must be."

### The song for that post-night out, pre-matriculation rush to get ready

*Maddy: Charli XCX - "Good Ones"*

If your college is like mine, you will likely have a painfully early matriculation ceremony the morning after a big night out. Since its release, streaming "Good Ones" has become a part of my daily routine, and I only wish this hypnotic track had been there to take me from hungover mess to sleek undergrad back in 2019.

*Matthew: jxdn - "ANGELS & DEMONS PT. 2"*

To the average person, I imagine that listening to the music of a TikTok frat house alum-

turned pop-punk revival spearhead would probably elicit feelings of horror. I feel that it's important to master the skill of taking something that is apparently uncool and deciding for yourself that it is cool, hence why I have no shame in admitting that jxdn's *Tell Me About Tomorrow* is the album that pumps me up in the morning when I'm running late, and have to be in and out the shower in the length of a 2-minute song. This song starts off slow — perfect for easing yourself in when you're half-asleep — then crashes into heavy drums and guitars, which is fitting for when you're

frantically conditioning your hair and matriculation begins any minute now.

### The song you sneakily add to the queue whilst you're hanging out

*Maddy: Bree Runway feat. Yung Baby Tate - "DAMN DANIEL"*

If you're not acquainted with the work of London artist Bree Runway, then get to be, as she's about to become a global superstar, and you'll want to use your turn on the aux to introduce her to your new friends and assert your tastemaker status. The first verse of this song references "college" and "scholars" so feels vaguely apt for Cambridge too.

*Matthew: Wolf Alice - "Play The Greatest Hits"*

What do you do when you're unsure of everyone's music tastes, but keen to please? Well, you "Play The Greatest Hits" — quite literally, in this case, with this instant classic from the latest Wolf Alice record. This was a queue addition to my friends' post-exam get-together last term — somewhere in between "good 4

“  
Assuming you're a bundle of nerves like I was, this care-free anthem is the perfect song to help you lose your inhibitions  
”

u" and "I WANNA BE YOUR SLAVE" — and the song made sure to get everyone on their feet, jumping until our legs ached.

### The song that will romanticise your trip to Mainsbury's

*Maddy: Drug Store Romeos - "Frame Of Reference"*

Like me, you may require a little bit of romance in order to complete menial tasks like shopping. So, if during Freshers' Week you need to take a trip to Mainsbury's (the central Sainsbury's in Cambridge, for those not in the know) then I do recommend this lovely Drug Store Romeos track which is sure to make you feel like you're starring in a coming-of-age film, as you search for other hot people at the vegan aisle.

*Matthew: Ariana Grande & The Weeknd - "off the table"*

I've always loved music for its power to induce nostalgia when linking it to certain moments, or even periods of your life. Last Michaelmas, *Positions* became the soundtrack to my 8pm walk-to-Mainsbury's after a hard day's procrastination, and now I can't hear the album without imagining myself subsequently picking up smoked salmon and pomodorino tomatoes. If dramatically lip-syncing "Will I ever love the same way again?" underneath my face mask in the aisle isn't main character energy, I don't know what is.

### The song to play whilst getting ready for a night out

*Maddy: Saweetie - "ICY GRL"*

From experience, I know that this song, even with its under 2 minute run time, has all the affirmations needed to make you feel and look hot instantly. Hotter than what the mild Cambridge nightlife deserves, honestly.

*Matthew: TIX - "Jævlig"*

My getting ready playlist is pretty much the playlist of songs that I wish that I was hearing on the actual night out. I've perhaps had more fun in my bedroom raving to my pre's playlist than I have in any club setting. Between TIX being the biggest artist in Norway, and Norwegian universities not charging tuition fees, I'm thinking I ended up in the wrong place...

### The song to save a party

*Maddy: Dizzee Rascal feat. Calvin Harris & Chrome - "Dance Wiv Me"*

Don't make the mistake of choosing something 'underground' to save a Cambridge party. Like it or not, I've found that students here respond best to the songs they listened to in adolescence (see: both "Mr Brightside" and MCR's "Teenagers" going off at Fez club in my freshers' week). "Dance Wiv Me" is far less annoying than some other nostalgic favourites, and fortunately, its instruction to "dance" could not be clearer.

*Matthew: Kesha - "Die Young"*

There's a certain point during the usual playlist of Cambridge's LGBT+ Tuesday night out Glitterbomb where this Kesha classic comes on and becomes the night's second wind. "Let's make the most of the night, like we're gonna die young" is the song's plea for you to continue partying even harder than before. It's a particularly prophetic statement when I consider that the Cambridge workload feels akin to dying inside.

### The song that you will hear literally everywhere in Cambridge

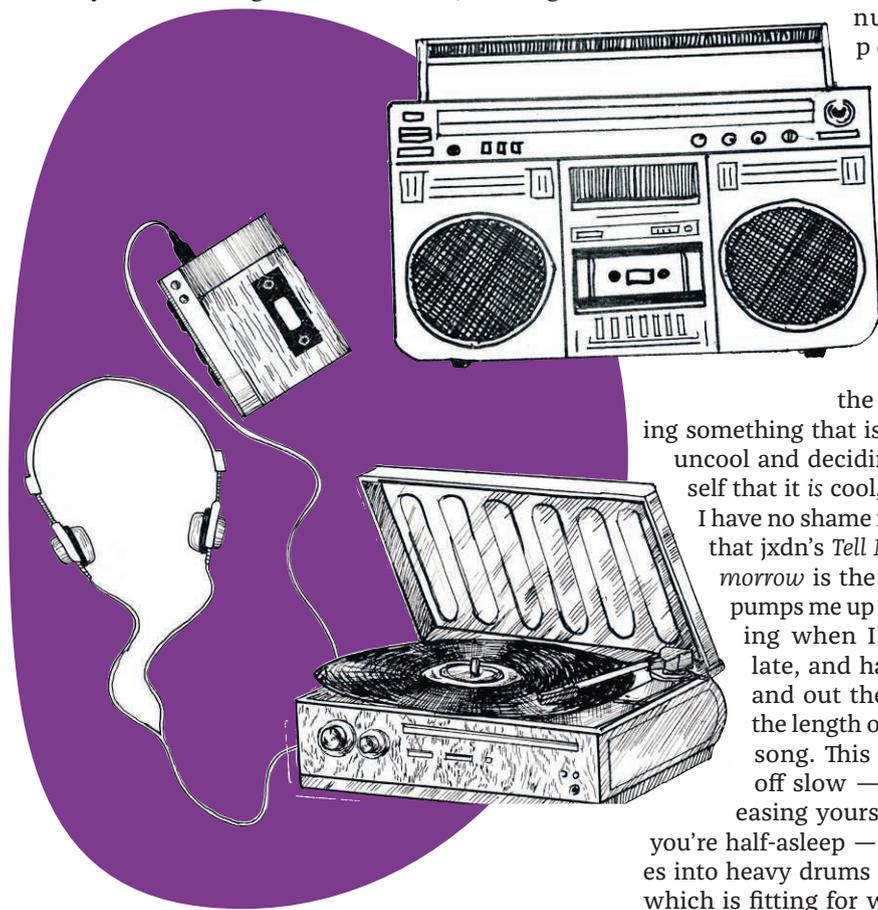
*Maddy: Any song by ABBA*

If you're coming to Cambridge and you don't like ABBA, I have some bad news for you. You will hear these Swedes everywhere at this uni - perhaps "Gimme, Gimme, Gimme" is being used as a last resort to breathe energy into a failing college bop, "Dancing Queen" is being queued for the umpteenth time at Lola's, or maybe your friend has had the very quirky idea to hold a Mamma Mia party. I'd suggest if you're indifferent on ABBA you just shrug off this cool detachment and really get into it, because there is truly no escape.

*Matthew: Adele - "Someone Like You"*

After "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "Sweet Caroline", it seems that "Someone Like You" is the most recent addition to the songs you'll hear when someone starts hammering on the keys whilst everyone else is absolutely hammered. The Adele classics usually get brought out when the night begins to slow down, which in Cambridge often seems to be at around 11pm when the bar is closing but everyone is gathered around the piano screaming their lungs out after too much free port at the matriculation dinner.

▲ ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY FLO BROCKMAN



# Film & TV

## CUFA and the Cambridge Film-scene

Film & TV Editor *Magdalena Gabrysiak* talks to the President of the Cambridge University Film Association *Jasper Cresdee-Hyde* about ways to get involved in student filmmaking and the future of cinema

**MG: So tell me, why did you decide to apply for the president position at the CUFA?**

JCH: I had served on the CUFA committee already, I was co-producing Cambridge shorts in my first year, which is a regular showcase of films made by Cambridge students as well as students from Anglia-Ruskin University. At the time, the event was organised separately from the Cambridge Film Association, until we sat down with the previous CUFA presidents and decided to combine them. Since then, we've managed to organise a few more online-showcases and the experience was so rewarding, that once the time came to decide what I would like to do in my third year, I thought leading the CUFA-committee would be a wonderful opportunity. And luckily, I got selected to do so.

**MG: The CUFA Facebook page says that the Association provides 'workshops and talks' for student filmmakers, what kinds of workshops do you organise specifically and for whom might they be of most interest?**

JCH: We provide various workshops and talks with student alumni as well as different creatives from the film-industry. We are planning to increase the amount of such events this year to show current students what previous graduates are up to, talking about the practicalities of getting into this seemingly enigmatic industry. The CUFA also organise talks centred around specific topics, for example last year in Michaelmas Term we had a screenwriting workshop with a student who had written a Cambridge-funded short film a few years ago. But we also run events with professional creatives established within the film-industry; well-known people like Ken Loach and a hugely diverse array of creators who work at all levels in the film industry. Alongside those informative socials, however, we provide advice and equipment for student filmmakers.

“There is such a range and diversity of productions and brilliant projects amongst Cambridge students”

To list even more, we also have a weekly film-club, where people meet up to talk about a specific film as well as showcase events like the Cambridge shorts - part of our 'Fresh to Film' programme which brings together first-time filmmakers and gives them the chance to fully create a film of their own. So all in all, CUFA really is the home of filmmaking at Cambridge.

**MG: How has the CUFA changed during the pandemic?**

JCH: That is an interesting question. Obviously, as with everything, we needed to organise all our in-person events and meetings online. But in terms of how the CUFA operates

it has been interesting because - apart from imposing a plethora of limiting constraints - the move to online events provided a lot of opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise. We were able to book way more speakers than usual and bring those to an even broader range of students. But most of all, I think, the whole of last year has made people realise the importance of film, with everything being online and through video we have collectively come to understand how much of our lives happens through and on a screen. So, this year, we are keeping all the enthusiasm and ambition that couldn't be realised in the midst of the Covid pandemic, whilst also transferring everything we have learned about film and its pertinence in our day-to-day lives.

**MG: How would you - as the President of the Cambridge Film Association - describe the Cambridge film scene, it's highlights, and the best ways to get involved as an incoming Fresher?**

JCH: The best way to get involved for an interested Fresher is to get to know the CUFA, following our social media pages to be informed about all our upcoming events and showcases. But with the Cambridge film-scene, I think, the problem is that it does not really exist, it's a bit of a wild-west, because it only happens when CUFA is active and when students themselves decide they want to make a film and advertise for it. It is not a coherent ecosystem, like the Cambridge Theatre for example, with lots of established institutions. And essentially, we want to change that, we want to imagine what an institutionalised Cambridge film-scene could look like. But there are of course other events, like the Watersprite Film Festival - one of the biggest student-run film events in the country, which is organised mostly by students from Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin University, so there are many different ways to get involved and further create the Cambridge film-scene.

**MG: Has the COVID pandemic impacted student's interest in film and filmmaking at Cambridge?**

JCH: Yes absolutely, I think the pandemic really heightened students' interest in film and filmmaking. I mean, we all have been watching way more films than usual this past year; but also because of spending the year on zoom we have all grown much more accustomed to the basics of video-making: good sound, proper lighting, high camera-quality. Moreover, with Cambridge Theatre going online, many creators there have developed their filmmaking skills as well, producing radio-play and zoom plays etc. So, CUFA is here to facilitate and build on all our experiences this past year and we would really like to enhance cooperation with theatrical societies. Ultimately, I think the pandemic has heightened our awareness of the many technical aspects of film and caused way more people and students to become interested in this wonderful medium.

**MG: How, in your opinion, has the pan-**

**demic changed the way we consume and experience cinema?**

JCH: It's really interesting. I think, the pandemic broadly has accelerated a lot of trends that were happening anyway, but it has also exposed how some of our predictions regarding cinema might actually turn out to be wrong. One such example, is the constant debate about how cinemas are on their way out and everything will be reduced to at-home streaming in the future, which almost everyone in the US as well as the UK was predicting. And now, at a time when all this has actually happened, we realised that this is not ideal and people don't actually like it. All of the sudden, we want to go to the cinema and have that experience. So, I think that has been a very interesting consequence of this pandemic. It's changed our expectations of what we thought the future of consuming film is going to look like and in a way it has perhaps even saved cinemas.

**MG: What was your favourite student-made film at Cambridge from the last year, or two years and why that one?**

JCH: The first films that come to mind

are the ones that screened at the Cambridge shorts festival last year. Our outgoing production officer Zeb made a really great short called *Convalescence*, which was a student written and entirely student made film. He has just released it on YouTube. It has really brilliant cinematography. We showcased another film called *Last Man*, which was very beautifully shot. At last year's Cambridge shorts festival there was also a documentary entitled *Their Story* about the homeless community at Cambridge, which was masterfully done, very emotional, personal and interesting. Honestly, there is such a range and diversity of productions and brilliant projects amongst Cambridge students that I could go on listing films all day.

“Online events provided opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise”

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# Theatre

## Enter stage left: a guide to Cambridge Theatre



Interested in getting involved in Cambridge Theatre? [Anna Mahtani](#) runs through all you need to know



**A**uditioning for the Footlights, Olivia Coleman famously ate a cigarette stub. Now, she's the queen. Other notable Cambridge Theatre alumni include Richard Ayoade, John Oliver, Rachel Weisz, Phil Wang and Sam Mendes. With this kind of showstopping history it's easy to feel overwhelmed, but before Monty Python were defining British comedy, before Tom Hiddleston stole our hearts, and before Mel had even met Sue, they were just a bunch of students trying to have fun. Here's a quick guide to everything you need to know to get involved in Cambridge Theatre.

### The Holy Trinity:

- **Camdram:** Camdram is the database that keeps track of all the shows going on. It's a great place to keep track of what you've done, what you're doing, and to see the different opportunities coming up.

### Cambridge Theatre Facebook Group:

Trust me, I know. I didn't want to get Facebook either. But this is where most advertising for shows and opportunities takes place. You can get involved without it, but it's a great place to keep your eye on.

### ADC Theatre:

As the oldest student playhouse in Britain, the ADC is the go-to for new productions. On their website you can apply to stage a show, see what's on and get tickets (they even have their own bar?!).

### Learning and Growing:

There are plenty of writing competitions, acting opportunities and chances to try something new; if you don't get the first thing you apply for, or the fifth for that matter, that doesn't mean you won't get there. Despite cliché, there really is something for everyone: from a musical theatre society (birthplace of 'Six the Musical') to the American tour, writers' groups to workshops galore.

### Top Tips:

- **Watch watch watch.** Go to the theatre, you'll never get a more accessible place to watch. Students get discounts at the ADC, but ticket prices can add up. Signing up to steward

a show (helping with tickets), run tech on the night, or even reviewing is an excellent way to see new theatre for free.

- **There'll always be people with more experience than you:** whether that's GCSE drama, parents in the industry, pure hard work or professional credits. Good. We're all students, make the most of it: learn.

- **You will find a home.** Inclusivity has taken centre stage these past few years. New Footlights president Adédámóla Láoyè wants "the comedy scene to be inclusive for all students," while societies like CULES and Impro-nauts have inclusivity built into their very DNA. On the drama side, societies such as BREAD and Old Vag Club have made leaps and bounds in placing the limelight on students of colour, women, and non-binary performers. If none of those feel like a fit, you can always start your own project and find people who want to work with you.

Cambridge's history may not be squeaky clean, but it's passionate students like you who are helping to change that.

*You'll find out just why no one ever wants to leave the Cambridge Theatre bubble; you'll find magic*

- **It's never too late to start.**

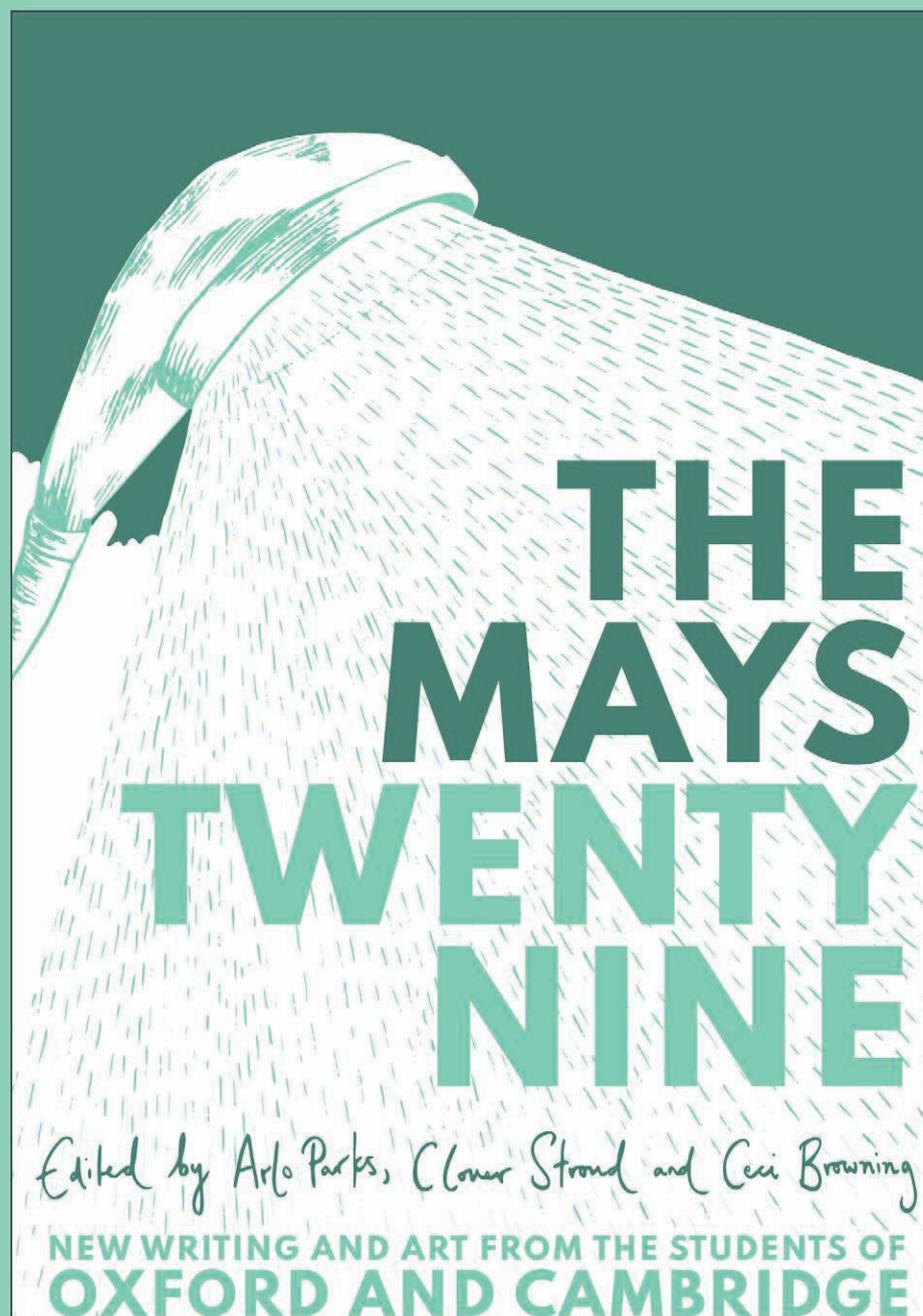
Some of the big names on campus didn't discover theatre until their second or even third year.

While some students seem to have been living and breathing theatre since they were born, for most people, myself included, theatre wasn't even on the radar until university.

Ultimately you must decide what's best for you in the short time we have here. Terms feel endless when you're learning new things, but they go by quick. Whether you're looking for a social hobby that doesn't include boats, trying to build a career, or just have a story you want to tell, there's a place for you here. What matters is having fun. No one is going to ask you to eat a cigarette stub or be Emma Thompson right here right now, but as long as you come at this with enthusiasm, commitment, and a keenness to learn, you'll find out just why no one ever wants to leave the Cambridge Theatre bubble; you'll find magic.

# The Mays 29

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# Violet Lessons from a Fresher's Week

By VARSITY

Violet Editor *Oona Lagercrantz* jumps onto the fresher advice trend and recalls the ups and downs of a turbulent week in first year

Autumn has arrived and with it the annual assortment of unsolicited advice to the mythical fresher-who-reads-Varsity-before-term-has-even-started, where returning students get to complain about their struggles and brag about their personal growth in the name of an humanitarian fresher intervention. This opportunity was simply too good for me not to take.

Now — before you stop reading — I happen to be very well-versed in the canon; including classics such as 'Just be yourself' and 'Just be yourself as-long-as-your-self-is-not-flawed'. I've also spent seventeen weeks of my life in Cambridge. And, although four of those were in legally required quarantine and it was raining during the remaining thirteen, I ended

up stealing an umbrella for the last week, and those seven days taught me all there is to know. You're welcome.

## Day 1

When I first left my room, I was young and naive. Since birth, I had spent every waking moment imagining coming to Cambridge and only hanging out with other Swedes and eating meatballs. Yet, there I was, in front of a plate of fish, chips and mushy peas — surrounded by Brits — tears filling my eyes as one, single, mushy pea escaped onto my white top.

## Day 2

Slowly but surely, I came to accept that I was in England, as well as the language known colloquially as 'English'. And suddenly Brits flocked around me, asking why

they hadn't noticed my existence before and if it's actually, like, really cold in Sweden. I soon understood that instead of just telling people to go away — as one would in more civilised countries — polite, but firm, umbrella pokes had the desired effect on the Brits. I was quickly able to master the exact amount of force required.

## Day 3

By now, imposter syndrome was starting to hit. Everyone else seemed to have actually gotten into Cambridge. Meanwhile, I had created a fake academically rigorous identity, hired someone to attend my interview, bribed the admissions office when it was discovered — but still been rejected — and then had no choice but to break into college and secretly occupy an abandoned room all year. For a few

milliseconds I even questioned if I deserved to be in Cambridge at all.

## Day 4

The Buttery was only serving Toad-in-the-hole and things were looking generally dark, until I went for a walk in the wild western outskirts of Cambridge and stumbled upon a peculiar lake that looked like it might have been the result of an accidental chemical leak. Swimming right below the surface were strange creatures that were definitely not ordinary carp, no, these were sharks, puckering their smug little lips to try to convince me to have a swim. It was nice and cooling.

## Day 5

Someone told me about the 'Day 5 Blues' and I swiftly signed

myself up for some college counselling. Upon baring all my regrets and fears on Zoom, I was met with a resounding 'poor you': a 'poor you' quite unlike any 'poor you' I'd ever encountered. This 'poor you' was special. World-shattering. Never-return-to-college-counselling-ever-again impactful.

## Day 6

I decided it was time to establish my Cambridge social media presence, and so I found pictures online of as many people as humanly possible, put my extraordinary photoshop skills to use, tagged random people in Cambridge, and finished it all off with the caption 'totally obligatory photo dump'. I then sat back to watch the likes roll in and replied to strangers that they looked amazzing too. Could life get any better than this? I wondered.

## Day 7

On my last day out, I armed myself with my favourite joke and set out to catch some actual friends (I was curious, okay). The first person I met began by announcing that his mum was a barista, which led me to start a strangely awkward discussion about what drinks his mum could make. We haven't spoken since and only much later did I encounter the word barrister.

Fortunately, I had more luck with the second person I came across: self-described "successful, popular and low maintenance" Ben. Based on our similarities, we clicked immediately, and — despite being told that it would mess up the entire structure of this article — he insisted on being interviewed.

"So, Ben... Could you describe yourself?"

"Why, of course! Not only did I rank first in the year in statistics, but I'm also a keen rower, treasurer of multiple societies, member of a groundbreaking band, and have countless, countless friends — which says a lot considering I'm really good at counting."

"Do you have any advice for freshers then?"

"Well, you've got to be what you'd refer to in business as a 'clout chaser'. Ditch your old friends, drink and smoke exces-

sively, distance yourself from God, only call your dad for two minutes every few weeks... wait, what's this for again?"

"The fresher thing for Varsity???"

"... the newspaper cult?"

"That is one way to —"

"Could you mention to the freshers that I'm single?"

## Concluding advice

If I may allow myself two pieces of serious advice, the first is to not be too judgemental. Not everyone will appear as nice as Ben; but, as he once remarked (in his posh south England accent), "there are many curiously endearing people at uni."

The second, and final, piece of advice would be to ignore all serious advice. Let's face it. You've got to find the answers for yourself by making your own mistakes. But don't worry! Even if your first year is perfect, there is always second year: there will be more opportunities for mistakes. At least that is what I tell myself.

Best of luck!

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# Sport

## Running rings around Cambridge

As part of Varsity's new "Sportspeople of Cambridge" series, [Neve Kennedy](#) discusses her recently discovered love for 'jogging' and the experience of balancing it with a philosophy degree

I am not a runner. My running water bottle, fancy little phone belt, and awful reflective waterproof jacket might suggest otherwise but calling myself a runner would be like adding some chilli flakes to pesto pasta and calling myself a chef.

I like to think of myself more as a jogger, closer to the group of suburban, American, posh mums that you see clad in their Lululemon at the start of a Reese Witherspoon TV series. My perfect run would not be characterised by time or distance, but by whether I had listened to a good podcast or if any of the houses I passed had pretty coloured doors. Yet while I will always hesitate to label myself a runner, it would be fair to say that I've pretty much mastered the whole jogging thing.

With millions of people downloading the Couch to 5k App last year, I'm sure very few will be surprised when I say that I really got into running during lockdown. As the initial excitement of Zoom-quiz-making, banana-bread-baking, and Tiger King-watching slowly became tiresome, I was one of the many people who fished their running trainers out from the back of the cupboard.

Before the craziness of 2020, I was the kind of runner that could probably boast about being able to skip straight to week four on the Couch to 5k App, but I was also the kind of runner who would be overwhelmingly relieved to hear the dulcet tones of a pre-recorded Michael Jordan tell me that my eight-minute jog was over and it was time for another 30 seconds of walking.

Running always felt like a chore for me. Pulling on my trainers and setting out around the block rarely ever felt like an act of my own free will. However, when the real claustrophobia of being confined to the same four walls filled by the same four people began to set in, the thought of leaving my house for half-hour to have some time to myself didn't sound so bad, and I slowly started to look forward to a daily lap of the block.

The first time I really ran much further than my trusty "through the golf course" route came purely from curiosity. In the depths of March last year, I wanted to see my home city of Edinburgh while it was completely empty. The ghost town of a once bustling city centre was something I wanted to see for myself. Going by foot came merely from the fact that using my Johnson/Hancock-endorsed daily exercise outing to

get there somehow felt a little less illegal than jumping in my car. Like some neurotic Forrest Gump - on this particular run - once I started, I just didn't stop.

Being a naturally goal-motivated person, the initial glee at the announcement that my final school year exams wouldn't go ahead quickly disappeared, leaving a large hole that looming exam pressure and impending deadlines once filled. But feeling the sense of accomplishment that came after that first run, and the new possibility that maybe with some effort I could run even further or even faster, I found a new goal.

I never consciously trained, nor did I have any sort of fixed improvement plan, but the little moments

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While I would be lying if I said I still run nearly as much as I did during lockdown, running quickly became a part of my life at university too  
”

where I would notice that I was suddenly running up a hill I used to walk up or that a route I once dreaded was starting to feel easier, the motivation to keep shoving on my leggings and trainers became stronger. Going on a jog soon became a fixed part of whatever constituted my lockdown routine.

At the end of last summer when I was preparing to start my first term at Cambridge, I was certain that my commitment to running would slowly teeter out to make space for the mountains of work that would pile up before me. While I would be lying if I said I still run nearly as much as I did during lockdown, running quickly became a part of my life at university too.

Although the same routine of dragging myself out of bed, shoving on a woolly hat, and queuing an episode of BBC's 'Desert Island Discs' while plodding along the pavement stayed exactly the same, my reason for running was completely different. I no longer ran

because I had time to kill, in fact I had to squeeze runs into a packed schedule where the odd Netflix episode had to be crammed into the small gaps between studies and socials. I no longer ran because I wanted some deep thinking time, instead I ran because, outside of my philosophy degree, I wanted time where I just didn't have to think at all. I no longer ran because I needed an adrenaline rush, I ran because I wanted to switch off and relax, focusing on nothing more than a few paces ahead of me.

To say it was a weird and unpredictable first year of university would be an understatement. It became uncomfortably normal not knowing whether an outdoor, socially-distanced supervision would go ahead until we waited to see if the rain held off, or how we wouldn't bat an eyelid when a friend would cancel last minute because practically

their whole college was isolating at once. But through this all, through every new restriction, every closed pub, every rule of six and postponed event, nothing was allowed to stop me from going out on my run. In a time of what sometimes felt like we were in captivity, running wherever and whenever I wanted felt like the closest to freedom I was going to get.

There were moments during the hectic term where a steady jog through the fens in the morning, or a quick weave through the weekend tourists on King's Parade, could give me the time and space I needed to realise that the world wasn't about to end if my supervision work hadn't

“  
A year on, I would still hesitate to call myself a runner  
”

been properly referenced, or that my essay would be just fine even if all the copies of the library book I needed were out on loan. On one occasion, going for a little jog to Mainsbury's to grab some chocolate saved me from almost throwing a printer out the window when it refused to produce anything but multicoloured lines.

A year on, I would still hesitate to call myself a runner. I will always prefer to stick to a good old 5k around the block whilst listening to some

old Taylor Swift, and the "through the golf course" route still remains one of my favourites. However, a couple of half-marathons later, it would be fair to say that something permanent did change when I was simply faced with a little less stress and a little more time. There are still occasions I find myself ready for a run yet the motivation to head out into the cold and wet just doesn't arrive and, in these moments, I swiftly strip off my ugly waterproof and make myself a hot chocolate instead. There are still times I set out for a long run and turn back when I reach the post-box at the top of my road, and times I just don't even bother to try to run at all. But there are also instances when the feeling of one foot in front of the other, with the sunshine bouncing off the River Cam and 'Love Story' blasting in my ears, that I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

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# Sport

## Sporting pedigree: it's a family affair



**Damola Odeyemi** Deputy Sports Editor  
**Alexander Grantham** Staff Writer

Sportspersons at the highest level are more than just athletes; they possess a certain level of celebrity. The wider public takes an interest in their lives outside of performances, and their families tend to be a go-to subject. As avid watchers of a variety of sports, we begin to notice the emergence of sporting heritage, or even dynasties. This presents an intriguing discussion of how elite athletes come to be where they are and what gave them such near-superhuman abilities in the first place.

To an armchair fan, the Korda family may not ring a bell, but to keen followers of tennis it will be more familiar. Sebastian Korda is a 20-year-old player currently ranked at world number 42, and rising rapidly. His impressive form draws much attention, as he is often touted as the future of American tennis. Meanwhile, his father, Petr Korda, was a Czech tennis player who peaked at second in the world and was the Australian Open champion in 1998. Se-

bastian's mother, Regina Rajchrtova, was also a Czech player who once reached 26th in the world.

The Korda dominance does not end there, however, as both of Sebastian's older sisters are two of the world's most accomplished active female golfers. Nelly and Jessica are right now ranked first and seventh in the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) respectively. They recently represented Team USA in last month's Solheim Cup, narrowly losing to Team Europe.

But the Korda family's impressive talent is not a rarity in elite sports; in fact, these biological links crop up fairly regularly. Footballers Erling Haaland and Kasper Schmeichel both have fathers who played for their respective international sides, while the Maldini dynasty is still going strong in its third generation with Daniel Maldini at AC Milan.

Beyond football, Major League Baseball's (MLB) three Molina brothers were all excellent catchers who peaked at the same time, each winning

a World Series at least once. Crossing over to tennis, no doubt the most famous and decorated of the lot are the Williams sisters, Venus and Serena, with 7 and 23 Grand Slam titles respectively. The duo were the face of women's and American tennis for the best part of a decade.

Knowing that 'sportiness' is apparently not a random trait, it begs the rather banal question of whether elite athletes are born with such talents or whether they, in a loose sense, learn it. This is the root of the age-old nature vs. nurture debate, and an easy conclusion to arrive at is that it's a bit of both. Other than parents providing the 'sporty' genes, sport is likely to be a common topic of discussion for a family of sportspeople. Subsequently, these children will have increased exposure to and awareness of sport and physical conditioning, taking inspiration from parents to build up the necessary foundations and, effectively, get a head start on their peers.

Parents that al-

ready have sporting experience are also able to streamline their child's pathway to the highest level. Elite sporting families, such as the Korda's and the Maldini's, are all financially comfortable, meaning that, in addition to providing exposure and personal guidance, these families are able to afford the best lessons and send their offspring to the finest training academies. This sort of privilege is even more pronounced in the case of less accessible sports like Formula 1 and golf.

In the field of F1, a family's financial aid can continue well past providing the fundamentals for an aspiring driver, with nepotism pervading the senior competition. The Haas Formula 1 team gave their 2021 seat to Nikita Mazepin, whose multi-billionaire father Dmitry is one of their biggest investors. Whether Nikita deserved the seat is another issue, but the question remains: would he be in such a position without his father's money? It's unlikely.

Sheer talent can only take you so far in the cutthroat world of elite sports; Ravel Morrison is a case in point. A Manchester United youngster once compared to Cristiano Ronaldo

and Ryan Giggs by Sir Alex Ferguson and described as "better than Paul Pogba" by Wayne Rooney, Morrison has endured a stop-start career and ironically now plays under Rooney for cash-strapped Derby County, following mediocre spells in Sweden and Turkey. His struggles had nothing to do with his physical aptitude for football, but instead problems with personal attitude and the law. Conversely, this is a situation rarely seen amongst the children of sportspeople, as fostering the right sporting mentality is simply a part of their upbringing.

Briefly putting aside nature and nurture, it's fair to say that, like in all aspects of life, luck also plays a vital role. Occasionally, all the stars align, and with the right resources, right talent and, crucially, the right family, the path to sporting super-stardom is clear, leaving only a poorly-timed tackle in training or an over-extended swing on the green to derail predestined fate. Laura Robson, a teenage prodigy once described as the next big thing in British tennis, is a perfect illustration of luck's unfavourable capabilities, after suffering numerous injuries despite being raised in a well-off household with a professional sports-woman for a mother.

As the camera lens widens to inevitably keep tab on the private lives of athletes away from the field, court, and track, it's not too dystopian to imagine a future where, just as reality TV buffs tune in religiously to observe the Kardashians' latest antics, sports fans pack out terraces to eyeball the latest in the long line of Messis or Ronaldos.

◀ FLICKR/JULIE EDGLEY

## What to expect at the Cambridge University Sports Fair 2021

**Liam Kline** Senior Sports Editor

The University of Cambridge Sports Fair 2021 will take place on Monday 4th October, running from 1pm to 5pm at the University of Cambridge Sports Centre. Bringing together over 70 sports clubs and societies from across the University, the Fair looks to promote the competitive and recreational sporting opportunities available to students during their time in Cambridge. Among this maze of advertisement tables and sea of light blue garments, students may fear floating adrift. But the reality is that beginners who cannot tell their squash racket from their ping-pong paddle will be in the same boat as seasoned athletes and tasked with the same mission: finding the sport they love.

Although many clubs compete at the highest level of University sport, notably the British University and College Sport (BUCS) leagues, over half of Cambridge's clubs can be picked up as a complete beginner. With demonstrations being performed over the course of the four-hour period, Sports Fair is the perfect time to try your hand at new activities

that are readily available and heavily discounted in comparison to external groups. For instance, Cambridge University Karate Club (CUKC), the University's most successful sports club — with thirteen consecutive Varsity wins — offers classes at all levels for £5 per session and a termly training fee cap of £60, whereas in London you'll likely fork out at least 25% more for such services.

If karate doesn't balance your inner zen, perhaps putting on a helmet and slipping into climbing gear with the Cambridge University Mountaineering Club (CUMC) would better help unleash your fighting spirit. CUMC is active in most areas of mountaineering and climbing, from indoor bouldering to outdoor sport and trad climbing, and even winter and alpine climbing. Fresh off this year's Annual Meet in the Lake District, CUMC first-timers and regulars enjoyed taking on the rocky faces of northern England. Meanwhile, the club runs "bouldering socials" on a Thursday at the Rainbow Rocket Climbing Centre, followed by a well-deserved trip to the pub.

CUMC President Bethan Davies-Williams described climbing as "a hugely fun and social sport", explaining that

"working on a climb often involves sharing of ideas, advice, and 'beta' between people". Bethan also added: "CUMC is full of enthusiastic and friendly climbers, from beginners to seasoned alpinists".

Or maybe you'd rather have your feet firmly rooted to the ground with a heavy barbell on your upper back. If so, the Cambridge University Powerlifting Club (CUPLC) would be your best bet. Voted the University's "Club of the Year" in 2020, CUPLC thrives on a close-knit, family-like atmosphere, dispelling stereotypes of hypermasculinity in powerlifting. Out of 147 members last year, 51 were women, while the introduction of a development squad saw 39 novice lifters assigned to the club's experienced members in an effort to provide them with a programme and mentor.

Samin Moghimiasl, this year's CUPLC President, emphasised that the club is "home to lifters of all abilities; from international powerlifters with national records to novice lifters trying out powerlifting for the first time". She continued: "This wide range of ability creates an environment in which members can help each other excel in the sport, while having fun inside and outside of

the gym".

CUPLC lifters train together at the Sports Centre's state-of-the-art gym, which Samin detailed as key to the club's success: "Being surrounded by individuals who have the same goals and mindset, both physically in the Sports Centre and virtually through social media, can be very inspiring".

But mountains and gyms may not be the perfect fit for everyone. Instead, the smell of freshly-cut grass might rouse your fancy, so why not take a wander over to Cambridge University Association Football Club's (CUAFC) stall? With both a men's and women's side that each have multiple teams, CUAFC boasts serious squad depth, which only means greater involvement for student footballers.

In a joint statement, Women's President Tatiana Kasujja and team captain Frances Steele describe CUAFC as "a friendly, inclusive, and supportive club that strives to bring out the best in every player, at whichever level they choose to play". The pair continued: "We have an exciting and busy season lined up with regular training sessions, weekly fixtures, and a variety of social events".

Meanwhile, CUAFC Men's President Kosi Nwuba commented: "It's an amazing atmosphere. We've already started pre-season and we have lots of new freshers who are really engaging and integrating with the club". Aspiring players at the Fair, however, will not miss the chance to join this year's pre-season, as women's trials take place on 9th October and men's the day after.

Kosi also stressed the importance of CUAFC's hunt to fill roles just outside of the white lines: "We are very keen to encourage non-playing members to join administrative roles to help with the smooth running of the club". He added: "This may be of particular interest for those who want to get involved in sports clubs at an executive level over the course of their careers".

In what promises to be an action-packed event, Sports Fair 2021 offers the exciting opportunity for students to healthily balance their work and sporting lives during the upcoming academic year. The reward of finding yourself at home in a new club certainly outweighs the risk of briefly getting lost amidst the busy wave of stalls, flags, and team representatives.



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