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Friday 20th January 2023  
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The Independent  
Student Newspaper since 1947

# VARSITY

## Students 'outed without even knowing' after SU data 'breach'

Caredig ap Tomos  
Deputy News Editor

Sensitive data relating to students' self-identification continued to be shared with students running elections on Cambridge Students' Union's voting platform months after the issue was originally raised.

Sources have told *Varsity* that countless students were "effectively outed without even knowing it" because of the breach of sensitive data, which took nine months to resolve.

This data, including information about students' sexuality, gender, race and disabilities, was made available to students running elections on the platform without the explicit knowledge of the students providing the data.

The data could have been collected during any election on the platform using the self-id system, including in the SU's main elections in 2021 and 2022, and could be viewed by students running elections for any society that also used the self-id system including J/MCRs and many large societies including the Cambridge University Labour Club (CULC).

This data was collected to determine if a student was allowed to vote for certain roles which require the student to self-identify with a particular characteristic. For example a student is required to identify as LGBTQ+ in order to vote for an LGBTQ+ officer.

The issue was brought to the attention of SU staff in January 2022 by Sam Carling in the SU's student council. Carling told *Varsity* that he repeatedly raised the issue at student council and nothing was done to resolve the issue until as late as June.

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"This house  
believes not  
everything is up for  
debate"

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Cambridge most radical uni  
in UK

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'Going behind our backs'  
JSoc call out SU  
hypocrisy

SU say NUS investigation co-opted by 'mal-actors in the government and media

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Varsity Editorial Week 1

“Cambridge is full of scientists, printing presses, theatre groups and all I need is the guts to write about them...-perhaps I’ll try out for Varsity next term”- Sylvia Plath (1956)

Inside ...welcome back to Cambridge, settle in, grab a copy, and enjoy this week’s edition of Varsity

Interested in writing for Varsity? Join our writers group on Facebook and contact our editors with short pitches for their sections!

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Editorial

If the King’s fresher story tells us anything about this term — it’s to look out for each other

If you skip over to page 3, you’ll be able to read a rather harrowing tale about a King’s fresher who in a 127 hours style escapade, got locked in his bathroom for three days. The worst detail of his ordeal? That his neighbour heard his shouts and dismissed them. We wonder how many other people heard the student too. Lent is a notoriously divisive term. Some love it whilst others loathe this eight week stretch in the coldest and darkest part of the year. A dip after the excitement of Michaelmas or a final hurrah before the exams; the jury is out year after year on Lent Term.

Despite our own views on the term, the fact remains that Cambridge is hard. Beneath a tower of deadlines and stress about student life are increasing external factors and stresses. For example the cost of living crisis is a concern for many, with increasing rents, more students are being pushed into work despite the uni’s ‘no job’ policy.

Even with these challenges, Cambridge’s culture can be brutal. Competitiveness is rife, as is envy and insecurity. Unlike institutions like the Union, students here don’t belong to contentious factions that challenge each other for supremacy. College or society life isn’t a race to the bottom and it shouldn’t be. At societies like this very paper for example,

we are colleagues and friends first- no matter what some dissenting voices may think.

Amongst controversy in student politics, essay crisis’ and material concerns, unlike that poor fresher left alone in his en suite, this term it’s especially important to watch out for your fellow students. Listen when they call for help: grab that coffee, go for a pint, take a shared trip to the library or cook together in your cramped college gyp. Cambridge can be isolating, and it doesn’t take three days stuck in your en suite to realise that.



Famke Veenstra - Ashmore & Meg Byrom

@ The Editor’s

“What are you looking forward to in Lent term?”

Trampagne”- Nell

“I’m looking forward to Burns night and Pink Week” - Esmé

“I’m looking forward to the weather getting better; there’s still loads of opportunities to go to formals, bops and hang out with friends; and you can get involved with new societies.” - Suchir

“Queens’ bubble tea” - Meg

“I’m looking forward to exploring more of the city by trying to sneak into all the colleges!”- Rose

“Pancake day”-Tommy

“Girton spring ball!!”- Daniel

“More horrible ARC coffee”- Lily  
“Missing my lectures because of strikes”- Josh

“Seeing Barefoot Guy and OSHU more on King’s Parade”- Katie

“Spending endless hours in the Varsity office”- Hugh

“Bagels from Market Square”-Jiali

“Ekin-SU at the Union!!!”- Beth

“Lent bumps”-Gabriel

“Varsity getting cancelled again”-Fatima

“Supporting UCU staff”- William

“Continuing to ignore Varsity”-Jess

“The Tab’s BNOC list”- Erik

“My birthday”-Trumpington Minion

“Looking forward to no longer have the SU leak my data”- Hugo



# Faulty Towers!

## Shoddy King's refurb traps fresher in ensuite for 38 hours

**Erik Olsson**  
Senior News Editor

**Eleanor Mann**  
News correspondent

A fresher at King's College was trapped in the refurbished ensuite of his college room for 38 hours, *Varsity* understands. Held hostage by a faulty door handle merely hours into Freshers' Week, the once bright-eyed Fresher was only freed when discovered by a bedder completing a routine clean. But by then, he had already missed matriculation.

A well-connected source told *Varsity*: "It was [Freshers' Week] so no one knew him and he didn't have his phone, which I think contributed to why it took so long for him to get out, which only happened when the cleaner came in on Monday.

"He slept in the shower space and when he tried banging on the walls for attention, his neighbour heard it but just thought it was a weird guy so ignored it".

The fresher was reportedly put on bed rest following the ordeal, suffering bad bruising to his chest from his attempts to break the door open.

The fresher's baptism of fire alarmed many in first year. One King's student told *Varsity*: "I think everyone who heard it was shocked, it's a really horrendous thing for someone to experience especially so early in their first year.

"I was also quite disappointed by the college for providing accommodation where something like this could happen, especially when there have been other issues with renovations recently".

The incident has raised questions about the safety of the rooms following the refurbishment. According to sources, King's College has since individually checked all the door handles in the Keynes' Building.

The Keynes' Building is on the college's main site, housing 96 rooms with adjoining ensuites. The accommodation primarily serves Freshers.

According to the website

'Made in Britain', "the internal refurbishment of the existing Keynes Building [was] being undertaken to provide cohesive and accessible accommodation for King's College's undergraduate students. "Ensuring work was carried out on time was critical, due to the impending arrival of students at the start of the new academic year".

King's College declined to comment (17/01).



Story continued from front page ►

The system originally allowed societies to change the name of the person holding a role on the SU website from a drop down list of all valid candidates for the position. For positions that required self-ID, this list was limited to students who had told the system that they identified with the relevant identity. The solution the SU implemented to prevent students from viewing this information was to remove the ability of students to change the names of listed officials on the SU website entirely. This solution, that is still in place today, would therefore only allow SU staff involved in running elections to access this data.

This solution was only partially implemented initially. Carling, who at the time was serving as Christ's College JCR President and CULC chair, claims that despite being unable to access this data for the JCR any longer he could still access it for CULC members up until October, when he once again raised the issue at student council.

Fergus Kirman, the Student Council chair, has told *Varsity* that he had raised the issue independently with SU staff both after its initial implementation in June and three days before Carling raised the issue at student council in October. On both occasions he was told that the issue had been resolved, despite this not being the case.

This second incident reportedly prompted the SU to report itself to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the government body tasked with policing data protection.

The body cleared the SU of any wrongdoing as the wording of the SU's data processing policy stated "volunteers" would have access to the data. SU staff however told the SU Democracy Committee that it needed to be made clearer to students that their self-ID data would be visible to SU staff and students running societies.

Speaking to *Varsity*, Kirman said: "This was a complete disaster for student privacy. It is essential that students know the full extent of who could access data about them, which they may not have even realised was being stored."

He continued: "Nobody acted with bad intentions, but the SU owed it to students to fix the problem when it first arose. Like many other LGBT+ students will, I find it baffling that this happened in the first place and unacceptable that it took nine months to resolve. Students deserve complete transparency and accountability from their SU, including about mistakes like this.

Students' Union, we have a right to see those efficiently addressed, in an accountable and transparent way - no student should have to repeatedly badger committees and staff like I had to."

Carling continued: "Not only that, but this data is incredibly sensitive - I can't even begin to guess how many LGBT+ students were effectively outed without even knowing it because of this breach. It's clear that there is a major problem in the governance and procedures within the SU that goes far beyond the responsibilities and powers of each elected team of sabbatical officers, who are clearly not to blame for this incident."

In response to this, a spokesperson for the SU told *Varsity*: "As determined by the ICO, there has not been a data leak at Cambridge SU. This specific issue raised by students has been resolved, and that function has been turned off. The SU did not ignore the request, efforts were made immediately to amend the system based on student feedback, however, we acknowledge this was not resolved as quickly as it should have been."

They continued: "Our data policy states that we will share data collected with 'volunteers', but we recognise that it is not explicit that we will share this data with society officers. We are working to update our policy accordingly to make this clearer. To confirm, this data is not available for students to view."

# NUS announcement co-opted by 'mal-actors in the government and media', SU say

## Cambridge University Jewish Society condemned the statement, accusing the SU of 'going behind our backs' and 'saying one thing in private and doing another in public'

**Michael Hennessey**  
Senior News editor

Cambridge University Jewish Society (CUJS) have criticised the Student Union (SU) for "saying one thing in private and doing another in public", concerning their statement to *Varsity* that accused "mal-actors in the government and media" of co-opting allegations of antisemitism, in the wake of the publication of the recent report into antisemitism in the National Union of Students (NUS).

Last week, an independent investigation into antisemitism within the NUS found that the organisation had failed to protect Jewish students from "numerous instances" of antisemitism over the last decade.

The report found that allegations of antisemitism within the organisation were viewed as being made in "bad faith to try and avert pro-Palestinian or

anti-Israel policy advocacy". The report concluded that "this has resulted in antisemitism, as well as hostility towards Jews, which has not been challenged sufficiently robustly or proactively by NUS".

*Varsity* approached the SU for comment on this particular section of the report, because the SU had previously said, in relation to the NUS report, that the government and media had exploited "genuine student concerns about antisemitism... to weaken student power and silence students of colour and those advocating for Palestinian rights".

After the suspension of NUS president Shaima Dallali in September, SU undergraduate president Zaynab Ahmed had also reaffirmed this position and said: "[we] remain concerned that those claims [of antisemitism] are being weaponised against students of colour and support for Palestinian rights."

In response to *Varsity*'s approach for

comment after the report was published, a spokesperson for the SU said that they "welcomed the NUS investigation into antisemitism because we believe antisemitism has no place in student campaigning and complaints must be taken seriously when they arise".

The SU continued: "When the investigation was first announced it was also incredibly troubling to see mal-actors in the government and media co-opt the announcement to attack, harass and intimidate Palestinian organisers and students of colour online."

The SU said that they "remain concerned by the antisemitism detailed in the report and are committed to supporting marginalised students against all racist abuse".

The Tuck report into antisemitism singles out the view within the NUS that allegations of antisemitism were made in "bad faith to try and avert pro-Pal-

estinian or anti-Israel policy advocacy" as directly contributing to widespread antisemitism in the NUS.

The SU had already released a statement addressing the report which was written with the cooperation of CUJS.

A spokesperson for CUJS has criticised the additional statement, telling *Varsity*: "We are disappointed that the SU has chosen to release an additional statement, after we had jointly agreed an appropriate response. We cannot understand why the SU has now seen fit to go behind our backs, saying one thing in private and doing another in public.

If they are serious about engaging with Cambridge's Jewish student community, they know how to get in touch with us."

The CUJS spokesperson continued: "Solidarity with Jews in the fight against antisemitism should be unconditional. The Tuck report is an unprecedented ex-

posé into antisemitism at the heart of the student movement and the impact it has had on generations of Jewish students. This should be the focus of any decent response. We hope the SU understand this."

The Oxford Student Union is set to hold a vote this week on whether there should be a referendum on disaffiliating from the NUS in the wake of the Tuck report. The resolution has been put forward by two students who have both served as NUS delegates and say they have witnessed "the horrendous issues the NUS has continually been associated with, not least the long-term antisemitism of the body".

*Varsity* has contacted all of Cambridge's JCR presidents to seek a response to the report. At the time of publication only four out of thirty one JCRs had responded, at Newnham, Robinson, Selwyn and St Catherine's Colleges.



## News

# Controversial fellow tipped to become free speech chief

**Nick James**  
News correspondent

Recent reports have suggested Arif Ahmed, a controversial fellow of Gonville & Caius College, is set to land the Higher Education Bill's new 'Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom' role.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill has already passed the House of Commons and House of Lords, and is now in its final stages before receiving Royal Assent. The Bill will change provisions on freedom of speech and academic freedom in higher education.

One of the Bill's clauses includes the creation of a 'Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom'. The role will oversee the performance of the Office for Students, a body which the bill gives extensive responsibilities, including the running of a new complaint scheme where students, current staff, people applying to become staff, or visiting speakers may make complaints against universities or student unions if they believe they

are in breach of their new duties of promoting free speech.

The Office for Students will also be given the power to monitor overseas funding to higher education providers if it presents a risk to freedom of speech within the law.

While the director is yet to be publicly announced, reports in national newspapers including The Times and The Telegraph have claimed Ahmed is a leading contender for the powerful new role.

If the reports are true, this will mark the second major post Ahmed has landed recently, after having been appointed to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) board by minister for women and equalities Kemi Badenoch, in December.

The academic is no stranger to being in the limelight on campus. His Michaelmas term invitation to Helen Joyce was the latest in a string of controversies over the last few years, including having been named in an investigation by the *Byline Times* into Republican billionaire Peter Thiel's links to a group of influential UK

academics, renowned for their 'free speech' advocacy.

Free speech activist and associate professor of the Philosophy of Religion, Dr James Orr, who has also been involved in past controversies, said: "Egregious assaults on academic freedom are rare in Cambridge and the university's policy is already robust, so it would be surprising and disappointing if someone were forced to resort to the legislation's complaint mechanism. I hope that the main effect of the new law will be to encourage universities to prioritise academic freedom as an institutional value over and above concerns that have nothing to do with the aims the tax-paying public expects them to be pursuing".

Joel Rosen, the President of the Union of Jewish Students, also expressed concerns about the bill last year. In a letter to the secretary of state for education Gillian Keegan, he said that the bill could foreseeably allow a range of extremists, including Holocaust deniers, legal recourse to obtain compensation if they are denied a platform".



▲ Ahmed has been tipped to take the role created by the government's new free speech bill (ARIF AHMED)

Rosen highlighted how this bill would have a detrimental effect on Jewish students across the country as it could allow "those who espouse antisemitic views to intimidate Jewish students while under the protection of the law".

UJS urged the government to amend the bill to ensure that "freedom of speech is balanced with a university's or student union's duty of care towards all its students."

## Student anger at Newnham college bill deadline

**Joe Bray**  
News correspondent

Students have criticised Newnham College for its handling of college bills, after payment deadlines were set before the release of the Cambridge Bursary.

Newnham's college bill was sent earlier this month, with a payment deadline of 23rd January, before the 6th February release of the Cambridge Bursary.

In an email to students, the college acknowledged that they "understand that sometimes it is not possible to settle the full amount of your bill by the payment deadline" and advised students to speak to their tutors.

Students have criticised Newnham for adding to potential anxieties during a cost-of-living crisis.

One Newnham student told *Varsity*: "I heard about rent before my supervisors even contacted me. They could be sending college bills out so we can organise our finances before term starts, but I think it puts a pressure on students".

## Varsity THE VARSITY TRUST

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# Police called to ski trip party after spiking

Ella McCartney  
News correspondent

The 2022 Varsity ski trip saw two reported incidents of spiking at its 'Final Night Party', held at a sports hall in Val Thorens, with only Oxbridge students in attendance.

The event organiser, NUCO, told *Varsity* that two females were confirmed to have been spiked by the medical team. The women identified the man to members of staff from a picture, and the incident was reported to the French police by the NUCO welfare team.

The police arrived at the end of the scheduled night, with the party ending at 00:30am on February 9th. According to NUCO, "attendees were asked to leave

in single file allowing the police to more easily identify those exiting the venue."

The man was taken to the police station and released without charge. The two women were given guidance as to how to take the matter further if they wished, but NUCO has received no further correspondence from those affected.

The incident comes one year after over five incidents of spiking were recorded at a single Varsity and NUCO run event held at Le Malaysia nightclub in Val Thorens. The 2021 Varsity Co-President stated that this was the first ever instance of spiking that had been reported on a Varsity trip. However, despite a change in venue, this trend of spiking has continued in 2022.

Further safety issues arising from NUCO's attempt to increase security at



the Final Night Party have been raised by students. In an email sent before the party, NUCO informed attendees that the cloak room, that had been available to students on the Opening Night Party (04/12/2022), was closed "to give us more space for entry and searching." In the same email, NUCO advised students to "hold or wear your jacket around your waist in the venue." Students instead left their coats in a quieter area upstairs. Consequently, when the party ended

hundreds of students were crammed into a tight hallway leading to the stairwell as they rushed to get their coats. One student likened the overcrowding to a "mosh pit" and told *Varsity* that "if someone had fainted, they would have been trampled on".

Another student reported that they "were crushed towards one door" as they tried to exit the venue, that the French police "wouldn't tell us what was going on", and that implemented measures

▲ **WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**

"made it more difficult to get out".

When asked for comment NUCO replied: "The NUCO Travel team expresses our empathy to those affected and assures our passengers (present and future) that as a tour operator, we do our utmost to safeguard our guests' welfare and escalate to the relevant authorities where suitable. Our policies are regularly reviewed to ensure we improve where possible".

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Alumnus of Pembroke College





## News

# BAME staff at Cambridge are paid less than their white colleagues, investigation finds

**Amelia Platt**  
News Correspondent

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff at the University of Cambridge are on average paid 2.9% less than white members of staff, an investigation by the *Daily Mail* has revealed.

The report found that two-thirds of Russell Group universities have paid BAME staff less than their white peers.

King's College London had the highest overall gap (19.1%). The University of York was also found to have paid Black women 41% less than white men in the last recorded year — this means that for every £1 a white man earned, a Black woman received just 59p.

SU Postgrad President Amelia Jabry and outgoing BME Officer Kefeshe Bernard released a joint statement to *Varsity* responding to the *Mail* investigation, calling Cambridge's pay gap “a devastating reality of the world we live in” and accused universities of continuing to “support oppressive systems created during the colonial era.”

Jabry and Bernard continued: “Melanated bodies, minds and culture have been chronically undermined, undervalued and actively suffocated for centuries... Cambridge University often tries to address these problems by creating committees, seeking membership from already time-pressured black academics and students, while not actually taking

actionable steps to address this issue.”

Moving forward, the SU says that universities “need to be actively anti-racist and actively seek complete and true decolonisation.”

The *Mail*'s findings come at the same time as the release of a paper by BERA into staff equality in UK higher education, which came out last week. The report found that education departments tend to be less racially diverse and older than other disciplines.

Another concern highlighted by the report was that BAME staff were much more likely to cite resignation as a reason for leaving the sector of higher education

**2.9%**  
The median amount more that white staff earn than BAME staff at Cambridge

than their white colleagues. Additionally, recent increases in ethnic minority staff were found to be mainly limited to a junior level.

The lack of diversity and pay gaps in higher education institutions has caused concern. Dina Belluigi, the principal investigator on the BERA report, has spoken of the need for equality among education departments, saying: “Higher education has such a big role in terms of the sustainable development goals that inequalities within the discipline

at a higher education level has really big ramifications for the UK's role in addressing global inequalities.”

However, the usefulness of ethnicity pay gaps as a measure of equality within workplaces has been challenged, with some arguing that gaps are not about BAME members of staff being paid less than their white colleagues, but more about the low number of BAME individuals in senior roles.

Back in May 2022, the UK government pushed back against a proposal by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee to make ethnicity pay gap reporting mandatory for companies with over 250 employees. The government said then in a statement that ethnicity pay gap reporting “may not be the most appropriate tool for every type of employer seeking to ensure fairness in the workplace.”

A spokesperson from Cambridge University claimed that the pay gap illustrated by the *Mail*'s analysis is flawed, given that it is “based on the difference in average pay across the workforce, rather than the difference in like-for-like roles”.

“The University is committed to equality of opportunity, and although the most recently published figures show a reduction in the ethnic pay gap there is more work to be done in addressing the root cause of the pay gap and creating a culture where all can thrive.”

“The University continues to work

on ways to eliminate the gap, including attracting, recruiting and welcoming a more diverse workforce, and enhancing career development.”

The General Secretary of UCU, Jo Grady said that universities should “hang their heads in shame” after hearing the ethnicity pay gaps illustrated by the *Mail* investigation. “We need universities to sit

down with their local union branches to agree action plans to address this disgrace”, Grady added.

The University and College Union has been involved in campaigning on the ethnicity pay gap within universities. Each year, they organise a week of action against workplace racism, with pay gaps being a key focus.

## Bernard and Jabry's full statement

*A stark pay gap for people of minoritised ethnicities is a devastating reality of the world we live in. Universities and other national institutions continue to support oppressive systems created during the colonial era.*

*Melanated bodies, minds and culture have been chronically undermined, undervalued and actively suffocated for centuries, we know this is a problem.*

*Cambridge University often tries to address these problems by creating committees, seeking membership from already time-pressured black academics and students, while not actually taking actionable steps to address this issue.*

*Universities in the UK need to be actively anti-racist and actively seek complete and true decolonisation. According to Biko, only by removing the conditions of racism can we be-*

*gin to speak about mutual respect and non-racism.*

*Universities should set goals of:*

- *Changing the system so that assimilation to whiteness is no longer a condition of excellence;*
- *Actively monitoring and seeking to close pay and hiring gaps;*
- *Give people of colour recognition and praise for historic and present academic achievements;*
- *Scrutinizing biases in research funding and teaching priority decision making.*



# Woke up, babe! Cambridge most radical uni in UK

**Hugh Jones**  
Deputy Editor

After several years in which Cambridge has tended to languish just behind Oxford in UK university rankings, Cantabs will be pleased to know that they have finally topped at least one league table: the Radical Progressive University Guide.

The guide is published by Civitas, a think-tank described by *The Times* as “right of centre”, as part of a series of briefings about “the new academic radicalism”.

It does not seem particularly keen to congratulate Cambridge on this addition to its CV. The report strikes a somewhat apocalyptic tone, opening with a quote from the Book of Proverbs: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

The *Daily Mail* has been similarly concerned. On the report's publication, they ran an article declaring: “Half of our universities peddle their woke agenda to students”

They went on to quote Sir John Hayes, a senior backbench Tory MP, as saying: “Universities should be places of light and liberty learning, but a dark shadow

has fallen over too much of higher education”, adding a penchant for alliteration to the report's Biblical flair.

The report's methodology explains that its results were generated by trawling University websites and news reports for references to “trigger warnings”, ‘content warnings’ or ‘content notes’, ‘white privilege’, and ‘anti-racism training’ or official ‘anti-racist’ guidance”. These were then totted up and used to produce the table.

The report's conclusion, however, is a little more fiery than the average mathematical report. It reads: “British universities are clearly in a sorry state, being politically monocultured and unmoored from the general population”.

Warming to his theme, the author slips into nostalgia for a pre-industrial past: “For many of my parents' generation, their first job was picking potatoes at harvest time.

“Today, their grandchildren are in university possibly pondering Foucault and Derrida, while fruit and vegetable picking are either mechanised or done by foreign labourers, with mass immigration fuelling division and depopulation and labour shortages in poorer countries.”

Students at Cambridge might not be inclined to accept that the University is ‘monocultured’. Indeed, last term saw the culture wars visit its hallowed buildings and cobbled streets with more fury than ever, as the debate over trans rights spilled over into Cambridge life.

Although Cambridge's political culture is undoubtedly to the left of the national one, debates by the student Labour, Liberal, and Conservative associations are all popular, and involve a substantial range of opinions. Though most academics are undoubtedly left-wing, figures like David Abulafia and Arif Ahmed feature prominently in the Tory-supporting press.

Civitas' report warns that universities' politicisation “threaten[s] the standards of evidence, reason and freedom of inquiry they are grounded upon”.

Seeing the think tank write off the nation's best institutions of higher learning as dangerously radical because their websites mention a handful of semi-arbitrary buzzwords too frequently, however, you might be forgiven for wondering if universities are the only places where the culture wars are getting the better of academic rigour.

# Disabled students told to record lectures themselves

**Caredig ap Tomos**  
Deputy News Editor

The History faculty have told disabled students to produce their own audio recordings of lectures this term, according to an email seen by *Varsity*.

While History lectures are normally recorded for disabled students, lectures for certain papers are due to take place in the Zoology lecture theatre this term, which does not have lecture recording equipment. Students taking these papers who require lecture recordings according to their student support document (SSD) have been told to record the lectures for these papers with their own equipment instead.

Students have taken to ‘Camfess’ to complain about the change, with one student describing the attitude taken by the faculty as “tough luck we can't record some of your lectures this term, but you're welcome

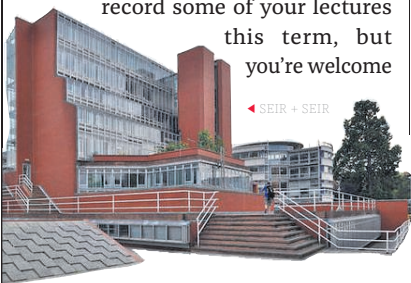
to come to the lectures and record them yourselves.”

This is not the first instance of departments rolling back lecture recording provision. Numerous departments have stopped providing recorded lectures after the University's General Board of Education (GBEC) gave guidance that departments providing lecture recordings was an “expectation but not a requirement”.

An open letter produced last month called on the departments running the HSPS course to also bring back lecture recordings after the course organisers made lecture capture optional for lecturers. The letter received over 350 signatures.

The practice has become prevalent enough for the SU's Disabled Students' Campaign to put out a statement criticising GBEC's decision to drop the requirement. The statement criticised the decision by stating that it has created “an unfair disadvantage for disabled students by increasing the administrative burden they face, forcing them to disclose their disability, and endangering the health of immunocompromised disabled students.”

The Faculty of History have been approached for comment.





# Beloved Sidge buttery finally reopens

**Bethan Moss**  
Associate editor

**Romilly Norfolk**  
News correspondent

Sidgwick Buttery reopened on Monday (16/01), after two years of being shut — it originally closed because of Covid-19 and hasn't reopened since due to staff shortages.

The Buttery first closed in March 2020, not long after finishing refurbishments. In Michaelmas 2020, the café briefly reopened for take-away service only, but closed again when students did not return to Cambridge in Lent 2021, during the third national lockdown.

In the meantime, Alison Richards Café (ARC) in the similarly-named POLIS department building has been overwhelmed by increased demand, with large queues stretching around the building every day. In the two years that the buttery was closed, the ARC was the only University-run food provider on Sidgwick site, which is home to twelve faculties that hundreds of students attend each day.

One source at the catering service told *Varsity* that they're excited to reopen, but that staff are still "stretched tight". On the effects of the re-opening, they said: "The ARC was never meant to serve such a high volume of students, so it'll be good to relieve pressure on them."

Although there's been no official announcement of troubles at the catering service, sources within it confirmed to *Varsity* that lack of personnel delayed post-pandemic re-opening of the buttery. The café was originally scheduled to begin serving students again in October, but failed to do so.

Staff worked at University cafés elsewhere in Cambridge while the buttery was closed. The UL tea room, ARC and West Café also suffered closures during Covid but have all since reopened, unlike the buttery.

Another catering service source said: "It'll especially be good once people start coming through again, once term begins and lectures start up". They were hopeful that full opening hours could be restored soon.

The buttery was quiet when *Varsity* visited on Monday morning, and although it opened at 9am instead of the scheduled 8:30am, things seemed to be running smoothly — with the exception of one faulty till. Frappés were also unavailable, but unlikely to be in high demand at this time of year.

It's probable that many Sidgwick-based students aren't even aware of the buttery's existence, since only those in third year or above will remember it being open.

One first-year History student expressed their excitement: "I can't wait to eat there between lectures, the ARC

café queue is always really long and the food sells out really quickly".

A fourth year MMLer also expressed their happiness to *Varsity* about the return of the buttery, saying: "I can't believe how many younger students have never got to eat there."

She continued: "The prices are so high though, I can only really afford to buy coffee and have to bring a packed lunch. I'm at a hill college, so I can't just nip back in the day. I really wish there were more options for affordable hot food at Sidgwick."

Although the University Library tea room, Newnham's Iris Café and Harvey's Coffee House are close to the Sidgwick Site, there are no supermarkets nearby

for students in search of more affordable lunch options. Sources told *Varsity* that Brexit had not caused supply-chain issues for the catering service, given that most of their food is from the UK. Prices have risen, however, due to the inflationary pressures felt across the country — a sandwich now costs £3, wraps are £3.20 and a salad is £3.75. These prices, similar to those in the ARC, are mitigated by a small student discount, but still leave Sidgwick students without low-cost meal options on site.

In light of the cost-of-living crisis, the University has been running a pilot scheme at the West Hub Café in which students can claim £2 off main meals in lunch hours if they show their Cam card.

However, as West Hub is located out of central Cambridge, it is only visited by some science students and those on select other courses, such as the new foundation year. The meal subsidy is therefore inaccessible to the vast majority of Cambridge students.

A University spokesperson said: "As with many organisations, University Catering Services has faced challenges recruiting catering staff due to a number of factors. After an ongoing recruitment process we now have sufficient staff to re-open the Buttery and we look forward to welcoming back students and staff to the site."

The Buttery is now open Monday – Friday, 8.30AM – 3PM during term time.

## Local foodbank in crisis, report finds

**Finley Brighton**  
News correspondent

Cambridge City Foodbank experienced record-high usage in the month of December, a source told *Varsity*. Over the course of the month, 1560 people were supported with emergency food parcels – a 24% increase on the same time in 2021.

The foodbank also found that across 2022, 13,580 people had to receive assistance from Cambridge City Foodbank, and 4 in every 10 of these people were children.

Last November, it was reported that Cambridge City Foodbank had seen its highest demand levels in its entire 12 years of operation. In November, Trussell Trust warned that food banks were at "breaking point" and predicted a tough winter to come.

Along with food bank usage, homelessness is also increasing in Cambridge. A new report from Shelter, the homelessness charity, has warned of a bleak start for 2023 — with at least 271,000 people recorded as homeless in England, includ-

ing 123,000 children.

Interactions between Cambridge's homeless population and the student organisation, Streetbite, reveal the sad reality of life in Cambridge for those living on the streets this winter.

Claire Gao, a volunteer at Streetbite, told *Varsity* that she knows "a lot of homeless people in Cambridge rely on donations" and other welfare programmes, warning that "council resources are really overwhelmed, and for emergency housing especially the waiting list can be months."

Max Earle, the organisation's co-ordinator, also stressed the social isolation that homeless people in Cambridge experience.

He told *Varsity*: "Rough sleepers may feel that despite sharing the street with the rest of the general public, they're not a part of it and they aren't welcome among non-homeless society".

This social divide between the student population of Cambridge and those less fortunate is something that Streetbite is working to tackle.

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# News

## 'Forced retirement' rules face new challenge

Cambridge dons are mounting a challenge to the University "forced retirement" policy, which requires them to depart at the age of 67. Under the policy, scholars have their employment automatically terminated in the September of the academic year in which they turn 67. The academics claim it has failed in its goal of creating opportunities for younger members of staff, and harms the ability of the University to attract the

best staff and secure research funding. A group of 53 academics have started discussions on the policy at Regent House, and hope to get it rescinded ahead of the starting date of the new University Vice-Chancellor.

In November, the vice-chancellor-elect had her original seven year term cut by nine months. This was because her original term was incompatible with the university's "forced retirement" policy.

## Meet the dog who stole the nation's hearts

Cambridge's Bennett Professor of Public Policy, Diane Coyle, and her husband, former BBC technology correspondent (and *Varsity* features editor), Rory Cellan-Jones, have been sharing the story of their rescue dog, Sophie, who was transported to them in a 72 hour van journey from Romania just before Christmas.

Sophie's story - and her reluctance to come out from behind the sofa - has

gone viral on social media, with #sophiefromromania being shared thousands of times. Her progress has been shared on multiple radio and TV broadcasts, with Professor Coyle surprised by the impact her new pet has had. Sophie's story of fear and discovery has struck a chord with people across the world, and Professor Coyle has promised to keep the world informed on her progress.



## University watch

Eric Williams brings you the top student stories from the other place(s)

### Oxshag shut down

A new dating site for Oxford students, 'Oxshag', is set to suspend operations over privacy failures.

The website would have enabled Oxford students to select 20 other students as potential suitors for a 'shag'.

Instead, the website's collection of student names, email addresses, and colleges without consent has led to the site's downfall.

Speaking to *Cherwell*, the creator of 'Oxshag' said: "Whether or not you choose to believe me, I started this genuinely with the best of intentions".

Potential for reinstatement of the site remains to be seen, however rumours have suggested 'Oxshag' could return to students just in time for Valentine's Day in February.

### Manchester rent strike

Students at the University of Manchester have been withholding rent payments.

Students are pushing for a 30% cut on monthly rent payments, as well as a rebate for fees already paid.

Over 250 students are said to have signed up, with action to widen from the 19th January.

Students have cited difficulties in affording skyrocketing rents as motivations for the action, discussing being forced to skip meals to make ends meet amidst the cost of living crisis.

Manchester said it had already provided support payments worth £170 for every student, however students have promised to carry on withholding payments until their "demands are met".

### Durham's housing crisis

A third of students at the University of Durham have reportedly not yet signed a house for the coming academic year.

Investigations by *Palatinate* found a lack of affordable housing, with prices having increased from 81% of housing being over £140 a week in October, to 99% of housing being over £140 a week in January.

Interviews by *Palatinate* saw students thinking about dropping out, or for local students, continuing living and studying from home.



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# Is Cambridge doing enough to help us cope with the cost of living crisis?

In 2022, inflation swept the nation, and it hasn't relented yet. We investigated extra help for students at all 24 Russell Group units to see how Cambridge compares

**Bethan Moss**  
Investigations lead

At the start of the month, the Russell Group warned that students are being put under serious financial strain, as maintenance loans are not keeping up with inflation — a December report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms that the poorest students are over a grand worse off this academic year than last.

The government has since announced a “cost of living boost” for students — including a two year freeze on tuition fees — but the Russell Group called the package “disappointing”, saying that it still doesn't address the issue of maintenance loans lagging behind inflation.

Cambridge is a member of the Russell Group and is by far one of the richest universities in the UK; its multi-billion pound endowment is comparable only with Oxford's. Yet a *Varsity* investigation into cost of living crisis responses across the country has revealed that Cambridge is giving significantly less extra support to its students than its Russell Group peers.

Some universities, such as Edinburgh and LSE, have frozen residential costs. Although the cost of studying in Cambridge is mitigated by short terms for those living in college, most colleges do not have enough accommodation

to house all their students, and all have increased their rents. Those who are forced to live out are at the mercy of Cambridge's rental market, where prices are some of the highest in the UK. One of the reasons private rent is so high in the city is that the Uni owns or controls a large proportion of the city's land.

Other measures taken to help students range from cash payments to cancelling library fines, and all universities are offering financial advice to their students. However, this investigation has chosen to focus on three key forms of support which most universities are providing in some form, to see how Cambridge's offerings compare. These are: free or subsidised food; increases in available hardship funding; and one-off payments to students. We've included extraordinary uplifts in existing grants or bursaries in our survey of one-off payments.

## One-off payments

Several universities have given students one-off extra payments this year to shield them from the worst effects of the cost of living crisis: Queen's Belfast

gave all students £400, and Manchester gave £170 to full time undergraduates. Other universities gave one-off payments to all students from lower income households, such as King's College London, which gave £150 to those with an income of under £42,875, and £160 to those receiving its maximum bursary.

Many other Russell Group members are also giving grant or bursary uplifts of up to £500, as in the case of Oxford, Leeds and UCL. Cambridge is offering no such one-off payments, nor extraordinary bursary bonuses, and did not answer when we asked them whether they had been considering similar measures.

A Cambridge spokesperson said that they recognise the “challenges that the rising cost of living crisis is bringing to many” and have “introduced a package of additional support for staff and students.”

They continued: “For staff, this includes an exceptional payment of 2% for 2022/23, and the reintroduction of the Staff Hardship Grant scheme.”

However, when the staff payment was announced in October, Cambridge UCU said the raise was “but a sticking plaster” compared to the scale of the cost of living crisis.

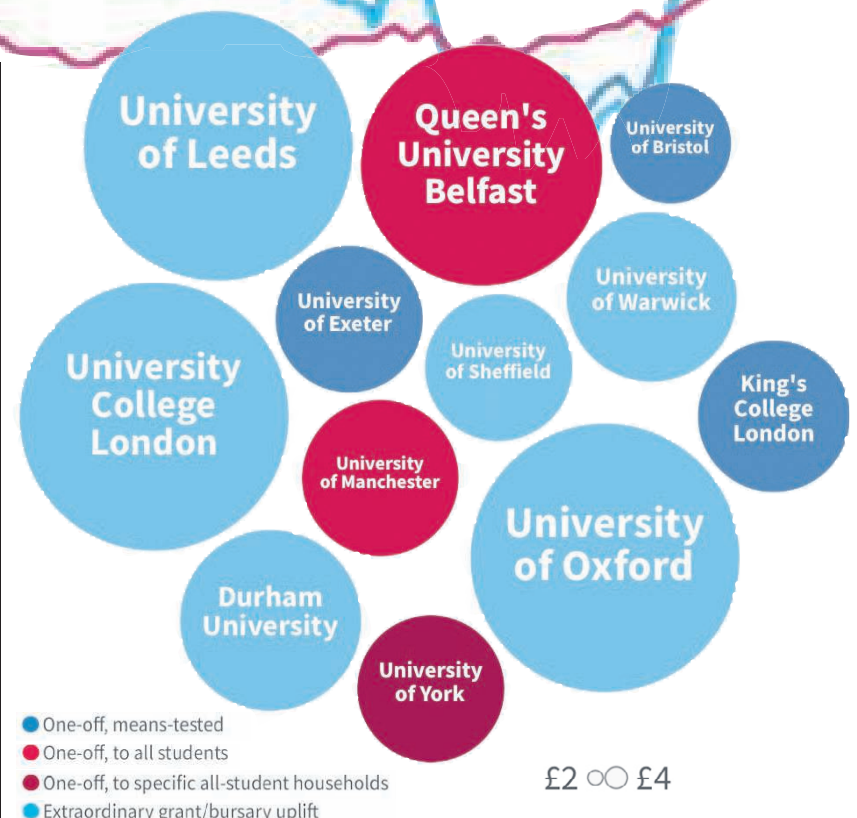
## Hardship funding increases

A University spokesperson told *Varsity*: “For students, we have set aside an additional £500k for requests to the University's Student Hardship Fund. This is additional to college hardship support.”

To contextualise this £500k cash injection, *Varsity* has obtained data from other Russell Group universities on how much they have added to similar hardship funds this academic year. Many had increased equivalent funds by double or triple the £500k pledged by Cambridge. Sheffield have committed an additional £2.5M to their financial support funds — five times Cambridge's offering. Only three Russell Group universities which responded to our requests for information had increased hardship funding by less than Cambridge.

Students we've spoken to have also found hardship funding difficult to access, both on a university and college level, with one complaining that the process felt “invasive” and “like being on trial for my basic expenses”. Another claimed that he was initially turned away due to parental income, despite explaining that his parents' circumstances had been dramatically affected by both the cost of living crisis and a family member suddenly needing paid social care.

## Free or subsidised food



## Max. value of cost of living payments given to students by Russell Group universities, 2022-23

All but two other Russell Group members have confirmed to *Varsity* that they are providing students with free or cheaper food at university cafés or lecture sites, with measures such as: free snacks and breakfasts, 40p — £1.50 hot meals, emergency food parcels, and cheap meal deals. Newcastle has opened a food bank for students, and at least two other universities have plans to do the same.

Cambridge has been running a pilot programme of subsidised meals at West Hub since November, due to stop at the end of next month; in one canteen, students can get £2 off the main meal deal at lunchtime. The University didn't respond to questions about whether there were plans for this scheme to be expanded or extended.

Other than the West Hub pilot scheme (and although some colleges have reduced or fixed their hall prices) the University hasn't made low-cost food available at lecture sites. This makes it hard for students, especially those at non-central colleges or with long contact hours, to access affordable hot meals at lunchtime.

Many other universities have also provided facilities on campuses or lecture sites to allow students to heat up or prepare food brought from home, so that they can save money while still getting a hot meal if they don't have time to return to accommodation in the middle of the day.

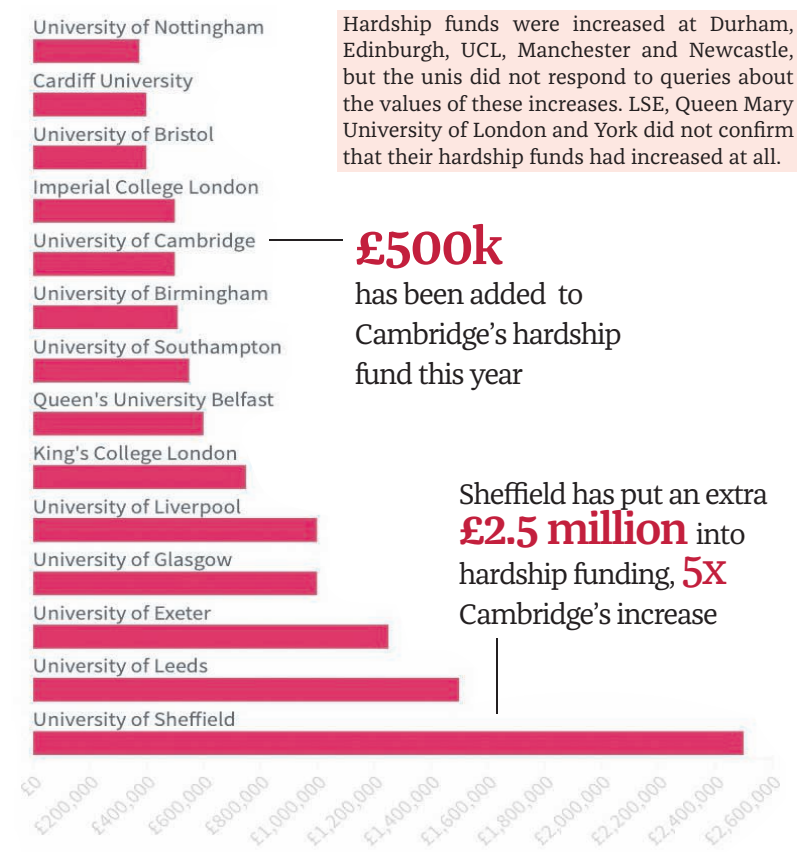
Support at other universities must also be contextualised by the fact that

students at Cambridge (and Oxford) face unique restrictions on their ability to work during term times. Cambridge students are banned from doing so unless they work for their college, and the availability of such work varies massively by college.

Students at Cambridge can work during vacations, but some told us that they're now having to take secret jobs during term time to get by, even hiding it from their tutors for fear of disciplinary action. Many have highlighted concerns that financial worries are impacting their academic work.

A Cambridge University spokesperson said: “Work is taking place to provide a robust estimate of the cost of living for Cambridge students, and how this is impacted by changes in prices. We will continue to do all we can to provide assistance to those experiencing financial

## Extra hardship funding made available to students by Russell Group universities, 2022-23



**Have you struggled to access college or university hardship funding?**

*Varsity* would like to hear about your experience, and your anonymity will be protected at all times. **Contact us at [investigations@varsity.co.uk](mailto:investigations@varsity.co.uk) if you'd like to talk.**



## Features

# 'It felt very alienating, and like I didn't belong'

**Taneesha Datta speaks to the first cohort of Foundation Year students**



▲DANIEL HILTON

Last April, 52 students were offered places on the Cambridge Foundation Year. The media attention arrived soon after: their faces plastered across websites, their names in national newspapers.

The new pre-degree Foundation Year in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences is the first of its kind at Cambridge. Free and fully-funded, the programme was created to offer a stepping stone to Cambridge for those impacted by educational disadvantage and disruption.

The application process is independent from traditional undergraduate applications. There is a later deadline and eligibility criteria which recognise different types of disadvantage, from bereavement and health issues to school performance and household income. "It's a really supportive scheme with staff who understand that everyone has suffered disruption in multiple different ways," says Sadia, a Foundation Year student from East London.

Annabel, who, like Sadia, is studying at Murray Edwards, says that being part of such a diverse year group has meant support and understanding from staff and peers alike: "There's really zero judgement and it's just the most lovely group of people, ever."

Sadia and Annabel's enthusiasm for the course is contagious: they talk about field trips to museums and poetry archives, about being able to experience Cambridge without the pressure of pursuing only one subject. The multi-disciplinary curriculum is designed to prepare students for the rigour of a Cambridge degree, and is taught through lectures, supervisions, and seminars, with regular assessments during term.

"The course topics really go beyond the typical white British or Eurocentric vision. They're centred around intersec-

tionality and the various forms of oppression we overlook," says Sadia. "In Michaelmas, I studied Generation Win-drush poetry and we looked at how black migrants used poetry as a form of protest. In another paper, we studied how ethnic minorities might have been increasingly disadvantaged because of Covid." Other papers offered include studies of South Asian religions, the human body in art, and the political significance of spaces of worship.

As the first-ever participants in a new programme, these students have found themselves at the centre of a debate about access and Oxbridge admissions. This discourse has reached Cambridge, with an anonymous Camfess post expressing doubts about 'watering down

“Excitement fades, and worry sets in: will I fit in?”

the reputation of a Cambridge degree'. Typical offers for the Foundation Year require 120 UCAS Tariff Points, or BBB at A-Level, while usual Cambridge offers require A\*AA or above.

"What's not understood is that it's not lowering standards at all," explains Annabel. "These are students who could have got these very high grades, but weren't able to due to extenuating circumstances out of their control."

The Foundation Year students don't have much control over this discourse, but they suffer its consequences. "I love the course, but I think people have been really harsh," says one student who

wished to stay anonymous. She tells me about students who ceased speaking to her once they found out she was on the Foundation Year, and about sharing accommodation with students who say the course shouldn't exist. "It felt very alienating, and like I didn't belong".

Fears of experiencing this kind of institutional bias and cultural isolation pose a major barrier in widening access in Cambridge admissions. The Foundation Year is aimed at those who might not have otherwise applied to Oxbridge - the care-experienced, young parents, or students from disadvantaged backgrounds. For many such students, Oxbridge's halls are still seen as impenetrable bastions of privilege. Excitement fades, and worry sets in: will I fit in? "Would they want to apply for the Foundation Year and be excluded from everybody else?" asks Sadia. "The label 'Foundation Year student' is another layer to consider in addition to class and race."

One student suggests that the programme's branding is othering, separating its students from the rest of the undergraduate body. "Because of the name 'Foundation Year', people don't realise that the criteria for the course is the hardship that we've gone through," she says. "Some people on the Foundation Year don't have homes to go back to, and it's hard."

There is a complicated ensemble of factors at play here, and no easy solution. Despite this, the students I spoke with were unanimous in their enthusiasm for the course itself. Each of them express their hopes of progressing to degree courses at Cambridge, and speak passionately about the teaching and their year group. "You get to experience Cambridge life and test everything out for yourself," said Sadia, "and I definitely want to stay on."

## A perspective on Belonging

Sobaan Mohammed

The transition between home and Cambridge always provides a chance for reflection. Where do I feel at home? Where do I belong? These are questions I pondered over while aboard the direct train from Birmingham to Cambridge, saying goodbye to the UK's second city and soon finding myself back in a much different, smaller city - my home away from home. I no longer view Birmingham as critically as I once did: a sign of maturity, perhaps, or a consequence of the four-month summer break, in which I was very much settled back into home. Upon returning back to Cambridge for the new academic year, I found myself in a perpetual state of homesickness, which lingered like a dull pain throughout term, only to be remedied by visits home. Everyday moments became points of comparison: while waiting for severely delayed or vanished U buses, I longed for the buses of Birmingham that come every five minutes and take me into town in under 15 minutes.

▼ALEX PARNHAM-COPE

While taking the ten-minute walk to the nearest shop, a Co-op, I longed for the corner shops of Birmingham situated within a five-minute walk, whose prices were low and shelves filled to the brim with South Asian foods. While in the train station Greggs' queue that snaked outside the shop door, I longed for the bustling streets of Birmingham city centre, where four Greggs sit within a short distance of each other.

I may be comparing apples and oranges here, with Birmingham's population being almost ten times that of Cambridge. There are many things that exist in Cambridge that do not in Birmingham. What is clear, though, is that the Cambridge honeymoon period, of viewing this place through rose-tinted glasses, is now over. I now see the two cities as places - with both the good and bad - which I accept in their entirety.







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Asha Birdi

## This House believes not everything is up for debate

Over-intellectualising sensitive issues is unproductive and uncompassionate

I've got a question for Cambridge this Lent term: must everything be debated?

Before the hordes of Arif Ahmed stans and free speech warriors break down my door, let me elaborate. Throughout Michaelmas, I observed a slightly annoying, but mainly concerning, tendency by Cambridge students and faculty alike to turn every topic into an argument. From the eternal discourse on which subject is the easiest all the way to the actual rights of minorities, no "issue" is safe from the fate of being picked apart and ruthlessly intellectualised until all substance and ties to reality have been lost for good.

This tendency to overintellectualise may be the natural product of a university environment where young minds are growing and evolving. By no means am I criticising such an environment, nor the great potential for self-development which challenging conversation breeds. But the problem here is a distinctively Cambridge one. Embodied by the uniquely chaotic nature of the Union last term, debate here has become unproductive, unfeeling and ultimately disconnected from reality. Its main purpose

is no longer to expose or educate, but merely to affirm the existing positions of one side or the other while flexing the big, big brains of all those involved. The Cambridge brand of argument desperately needs to give introspection a try, making room for a bit of compassion.

As a ravenous little fresher, desperate to assimilate into Cambridge but terrified at the prospect, I joined the Union. My college subsidised the membership fee, and I was all for having my worldview challenged—something I thought the Union might offer.

While I initially found myself in awe of the reputation of its speakers, I now feel as though my opinions have only been reinforced by debates which frequently descended into jeering rightwing talking points. I don't know whether my worldview was expanded so much as it was hardened. Last term, a controversial debate on reparations left many – myself included—shocked by the racist undertones of several speeches.

Under the unforgiving lights of the chamber, I was struck by the feeling that we had lost any sense of why we were debating in the first place; it had quickly devolved into a narcissistic race to the

bottom. The real individuals with their livelihoods at stake had been eclipsed by callous attempts at entertainment.

Calvin Robinson, an opposition speaker who—to put it mildly—caused a stir with his defence of British imperialism, went on to criticise students for expressing visceral reactions to his arguments, as though they should be ashamed for their aversion to his harmful ranting. I hope I speak for all students when I say that empathy is never shameful.

As I considered never coming back to the Union, a friend made a comment that struck me as revealing of the toxic relationship between Cambridge and making everything an intellectual issue. Despite having only the best of intentions, they remarked that it was my "duty" to see debates like these through, as if my non-attendance neglected some great moral responsibility. Would I be banished by the divine gods of rhetoric and reason for my sins?

My friend's comment struck me as tone-deaf, particularly as it was regarding an event that was borderline traumatising for many students of an ethnic minority background. There is a

propensity here to act as if everything is and should be up for debate, but I think we also have to acknowledge that such a mindset comes from a place of privilege.

At Cambridge, conversations about privilege are met with about as much enthusiasm as a 7am fire drill, but I think it is gravely important that we have them. It is far easier for students from more privileged backgrounds to want to debate rights when their identity isn't up for grabs on the platter of discourse. It is dangerous to forget that real people are at the heart of our words, especially when it comes to politics.

Identifying when something does not need to be divorced from its original subject and made unnecessarily intellectual is a skill that a few of us need to get better at—a skill that would

probably make Cambridge students a bit more likeable too.

It's completely okay to want to draw the line somewhere. Approaching debate with sensitivity, both within the Union and without, is not an affront to the academic, no matter how much some fellows here suggest otherwise. Almost all of our interactions, whether during Cambridge or beyond, would undoubtedly improve if we spent less time stroking our own academic egos and a little more time trying to live in someone else's shoes. Not every discussion needs a "devil's advocate", I promise.



Lotte Brundle

## A reflection on 'Cambarrassment'

Is it wrong to feel ashamed of attending this university?

“So, which university do you go to?”—the dreaded question. Much like Marmite, the answer tends to tilt the first impression scale immediately towards either 'love' or 'hate'. I know it often does because five years ago, when I would ask someone this and receive the reply "Cambridge", I would categorically go for the "hate" option. These days my answer to this question comes in two parts: first (eyes glued to the floor) "Cambridge", followed by (upon further interrogation) "uni of". And even though I know I shouldn't, I often feel embarrassed about going here—ashamed even.

Reverse class snobbery is an ugly and unlikeable trait, particularly when your own upbringing places you firmly in the category of "middle class", and so, not only do I feel embarrassed when people ask which university I go to, I also feel embarrassed of my embarrassment.

Let's just say that if I had to define my relationship with Cambridge on Facebook, I'd go for: "It's complicated".

Firstly, because I am proud to go here. It's an achievement to get in, especially as it is something which I never remotely dreamed was on the cards for me. In sixth form, following individual meetings with the school sorting hat (Careers Advisor), a small selection of students received a Hogwarts-style invitation. They had been identified as the "chosen ones"; the rest of us, it seemed, were muggles. In other words, these students were the "Oxbridge" hopefuls. The extracurricular group they were in was called "highflyers" or something of the sort, and included help with the application process and interview prep for the lucky few.

In the meantime, I had already stated my intent to the careers advisor to apply to dance college once my A-levels were completed (Dad had insisted they were a necessary backup: he was then and is *always* right). I got on well at school, and excelled in the more creative subjects, but never considered myself an "academic"; my mind was always somewhere else, as I dreamed of a more

exciting place than my GCSE Biology textbook.

Needless to say, I was not identified as a potential Oxbridge applicant (more fool them). Because of this I decided I fundamentally hated Oxbridge: both the silly portmanteau and the pretentious snobs that went there (more fool *me*). I am ashamed of my past pig-headed prejudices.

Several years later, after applying and receiving an offer, I was disgusted by how openly I had despised this place before. I couldn't help but feel a hypocrite for deciding to accept. But I'd been working in a restaurant for two years, and knew that the reputation of this place could be my golden ticket to a degree, a different career, and a chance to finally make something of myself.

At my bar job at home, a customer once asked me where I went to university. Instead of the expected local answer: University of Kent, or Christchurch, I answered truthfully. The drunk men at the bar took arms immediately: "Think you're too good to be here serving us commoners then?", one asked. I wanted to be angry, and yet, how could

I be, when a few years ago I would have thought the exact same thing? Later on that night, mopping up the vomit one of them was kind enough to leave for me in the customer bathroom, I allowed myself to feel angry.

“A bit of  
"Cambarrassment"  
is healthy”

So, the other day, when I was attending a master's open evening at a London University, when someone asked which university I go to—I panicked. Everyone else has already answered. Bristol. Nottingham. Greenwich. How could I say "Cambridge" now? They would surely think that I was an elitist prick, I stuttered, and drew even more attention to my answer than if I had answered.

So, is my "Cambarrassment" well founded? Yes and no. No, because I am proud to go here and because Cambridge is taking steps towards becoming more inclusive. And, as someone who's often not taken seriously, it's something to my name, something that validates me. But also, yes, because those steps are mere tiptoes when you look at the bigger picture. This university is not as inclusive as it needs to be, or says that it is, and although the stereotype isn't true of everyone, it comes from a place of truth. Cambridge historically has been elitist, and to great extent still is.

While maybe I shouldn't feel ashamed of going to Cambridge – a bit of 'Cambarrassment' is healthy, if it stands for an understanding that, for many deserving young people, this university and its resources are inaccessible. Knowing that, we can reflect on what we need to do in order to change it from the inside. If we do so in earnest, students in their local pubs across the country could reply "Cambridge" next time they're asked the dreaded question – hopefully with more pride for what this institution represents than embarrassment.





Famke Veenstra-Ashmore

In his first speech of the year, Rishi Sunak claimed that “In a world where data is everywhere and statistics underpin every job, letting our children out into that world without those skills is letting our children down”. While data and statistics might be more frequently drawn upon than ever, a working knowledge of them is not necessary for “every job”. But for Sunak, data literacy is a prized trait. He’d rather have us all trained to “work in cyber” than pursue our own interests. Apparently, by electing not to push every child in the direction of jobs in STEM, we’re letting down a generation.

I’ve argued before that the government’s current rhetoric about the arts is proving dangerous. But the vast majority of university students (even staunch defenders of the arts and humanities like myself) cannot deny the current edge in employability of STEM degrees. This appreciation is rarely reciprocated: even casual Camfess browsing reveals widespread scepticism of arts degrees among students, symptomatic of the much wider undermining of these subjects. There seems to be a complete absence of understanding of what arts degrees offer in their entirety, and by extension, the merit and nature of A-levels in the arts and humanities.

Sunak is right to point out the usefulness of numeracy in our modern job market. It’s widely acknowledged that maths is not just about memoris-

# Sunak’s maths plans will make A-levels more elitist

## Forcing students into STEM will widen the privilege gap

ing formulae; it teaches a distinct and logical way of processing information. However, many fail to recognise the transferability of similar skills, such as critical thinking, facilitated by the arts and humanities. Arts subjects do not just offer what’s advertised on the tin. History, for instance, is not just about learning the facts of the past: it also teaches you to reach substantiated conclusions using well-judged evidence

“
 Making any subject compulsory would deter students from further study
 ”

—something just as important when thinking about how we use and interpret data in modern professions. Often, the scope which such subjects offer and the breadth of skills involved surpass those outlined by narrower and more specialist STEM subjects. The constant diminishing of the arts and humanities has directly produced attitudes such as Sunak’s, resulting in an education policy which discredits their value and over-emphasises alternative routes.

Regardless, maths is already the most popular A-level subject, being essential

for the vast majority of STEM degrees and a formative part of the secondary school curriculum. Despite being a student of English – frequently held against maths as its antithesis – I have nothing against maths. In fact, I took it as an A-level myself (albeit only for one year), reasoning that it would give me some variety amongst my essay subjects. Students already recognise the value of such a qualification and have the capability to decide whether or not to take it up for themselves. It is belittling of Sunak to suggest that it must be made compulsory to demonstrate its importance. For many career paths, it simply isn’t relevant, beyond the fact that students generally do not want (and should not have) to study something they are not interested in after having reached a functional level. This is in addition to the fact that many of the jobs Sunak gestures towards require skills contrary to those taught at A-level maths, leaving the proposal unfit for bridging the gap he observes.

The ability to specialise early, placing interest and career direction at the centre of students’ last couple of years of secondary education, is in many ways advantageous. It’s a practice which hypothetically places individual choice at its centre. Making any subject compulsory would deter students from further study and breed apathy in those who choose to take it. Many

commentators omit to mention the fact that as 16-year-olds, we’re also given the option to leave mainstream, academic secondary education altogether. While more people are acknowledging that A-levels certainly aren’t the only path to university, never mind a successful and fulfilling career, making maths compulsory is a sure-fire way to put students off this particular route – having negative implications, no doubt, for social mobility.

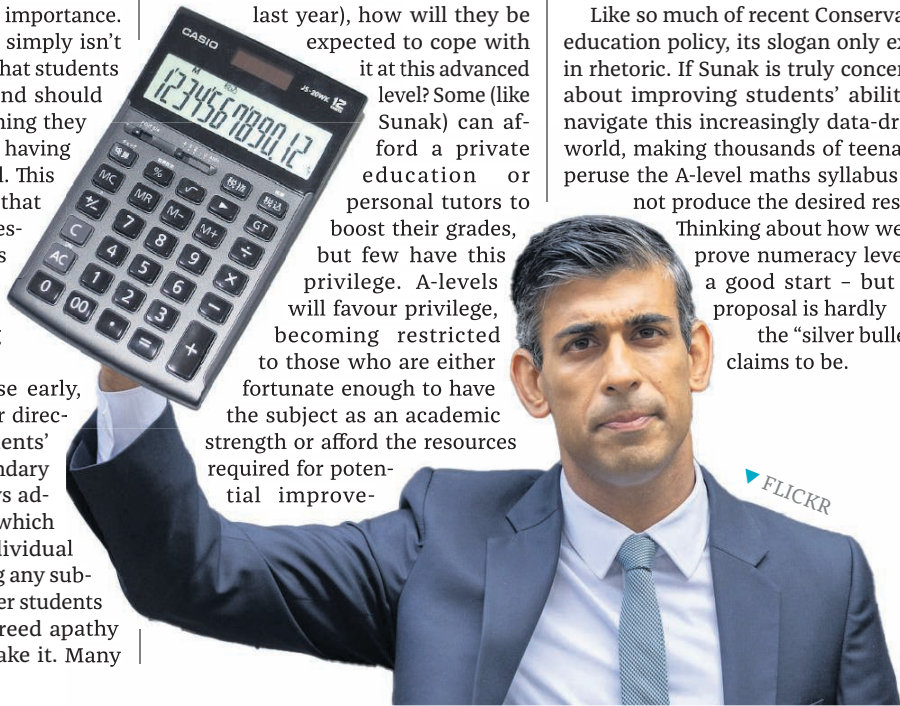
If students already struggle with maths (a fifth having failed the GCSE last year), how will they be expected to cope with it at this advanced level? Some (like Sunak) can afford a private education or personal tutors to boost their grades, but few have this privilege. A-levels will favour privilege, becoming restricted to those who are either fortunate enough to have the subject as an academic strength or afford the resources required for potential improve-

ment. This is in addition to furthering the misconception that those who succeed in STEM are “more intelligent” than those with strengths in other (and not always academic) areas.

It’s no wonder that the current PM, privy to Winchester College’s stellar teaching standards, would view extending his experience of A-level maths to all pupils as a “silver bullet”. Sunak’s own maths teacher has admitted the “self-revealing” nature of Sunak’s proposal. The benefits he speaks of simply cannot be extended to everyone.

Like so much of recent Conservative education policy, its slogan only exists in rhetoric. If Sunak is truly concerned about improving students’ ability to navigate this increasingly data-driven world, making thousands of teenagers peruse the A-level maths syllabus will not produce the desired results.

Thinking about how we improve numeracy levels is a good start – but this proposal is hardly the “silver bullet” it claims to be.



# Lent Term: cruel mistress, season of torment, or social construct?

Your favourite *Varsity* writers offer their hottest takes on the issue every Cantab is talking about

Daniel Hilton

The hymn ‘Forty Days and Forty Nights’ springs to mind when I think of Lent term, not only because the hymn is designed for the ecclesiastical Lent (and is an absolute banger) but also because the words echo the suffering that we all feel in this bleak time of the year. Gone is any trace of the joyful innocence of Michaelmas, with its Freshers’ Week and the excitement of coming back to college. The hedonism of May Week is too far away to temper the pain of not only losing a couple hundred quid on a ticket but also knowing we have to make it through exams first.

Lent, then, is Michaelmas without any of the good bits and the words of the hymn show this—“shall not we your sorrow share, and from worldly joys abstain”. Or for a more accurate version: “shall not we do our suppo work, and from Sunday Lola’s abstain”

Lotte Brundle

Fancy a hot take on Lent term? Well, to that I say, increasingly like my cups of tea are becoming, here’s a lukewarm one: this lent, why not relent? We’ve done Michaelmas and the anxiety-inducing pit that goes by the name of Easter term is yet to come. You wouldn’t start to sprint half-way through a marathon, so this term why not lie back, close your eyes, and let the term wash over you without resistance. They say the mightiest battles are fought valiantly, but I disagree. As a weather-worn and resigned third year, with creaky knees and an ever depleting joie de vivre, my passion for my degree is all but disappeared.

I’ve had enough of the relentless academic fight. My plan, instead, is to sit back and let Lent term take the wheel. She is my mistress, I simply her follower, yielding to her many demands. My plan: have no plan.

Hugh Jones

I was told many lies when I applied to Cambridge. Days after I hit ‘send’ on UCAS, our master—half the reason I applied to Magdalene—quit. On arriving, I discovered that my College’s tradition of formal hall every night had become yet another casualty of covid. Yet the biggest lie I was told is that Cambridge’s terms are only eight-weeks long. I relished the thought of laughing as friends at Durham struggled with essay crises as I returned home for the vac. How foolish I was. Cambridge does not have eight-week terms. It does not even have terms. There is just a blur which begins with the first 9AM lecture in October and only ends when you finally put down your pen at the close of your last exam in June. The maelstrom of coursework, supos, and essay deadlines, fear, trembling, and shame that lies between the two cannot be divided or understood. It is simply to be endured.

Emily Lawson-Todd

I’m actually going to take a highly controversial stance here and say that I actually quite like Lent term. Though it is undeniably grey and sad, the cold drizzly weather inhibiting me from wearing nice outfits to my daily Sidgwick library session, Lent term is the wrongly-maligned ugly sibling to Michaelmas and Easter. But whereas Easter is full of exam stress and wasps and Michaelmas is preoccupied with trying to get back into the swing of things after a long summer of avoiding degree work, Lent is a blank slate, completely unfettered. It’s the perfect time to try something new without any judgement.

Not bothered about creating a good beginning or trying to end strong, Lent’s meh-ness allows it to be a term of creativity and freedom, even if the January drizzle does make my flares soggy.

Ellie Austin

Lame Lent, as it’s been affectionately known by me and my pals, has been officially rebranded this year into “Lit Lent”. Obviously the embarrassing name aside, the logic goes as follows: the only way to get through Lent is to recognise and accept its flaws into the workings of the term. Lent can never stand up to the naive hopefulness of Michaelmas, nor the sunshine excitement of Easter, but it does have one thing: focus.

Lent term can’t catch me out with burn-out because I’m *already* burnt out from last term; Lent term can’t disappoint because I already *know* I’m going to cancel all my Week 8 plans to horrendously cram my coursework in before the end-of-term deadline. So, the only option is to accept reality and make the best out of it...as they say: “work hard, play hard”.



# Comment



▲ Illustration by Hannah Castle



**Gwenno Robinson**

## Don't be fooled by Oxbridge's myth of meritocracy

Elite universities are not the great equaliser they claim to be

Earlier this month, Katharine Birbalsingh announced her resignation as Chair of the Social Mobility Commission. Defending her decision, she wrote that her “propensity to voice opinions that are considered controversial” was putting the commission “in jeopardy”.

She is right. From arguing that children shouldn't be allowed smartphones to suggesting girls were put off taking Physics A-level as it contained too much “hard maths”, Birbalsingh regularly attracted public backlash for the opinions she expressed.

Her views on Oxbridge, however, appear to have hit the most sensitive of social nerves. In her inaugural speech in June, she spoke of the need to radically rethink what social mobility means, calling for a move away from the fixation with “rags to riches tales” of “caretaker's daughter goes to Oxbridge and becomes a top surgeon”. Instead, she appealed for “small steps up the ladder” rather than “giant leaps”, in a bid to promote social mobility for a wider range of people, not

just by creating “elite pathways for the few”.

Her views sparked outrage when they were misrepresented in some parts of the media. As pointed out in her resignation letter, the press painted her as believing that “working class people should stay in their lane”, when she merely called for a broader conceptualisation of the mechanisms of social mobility.

Her comments also require us to question the idea that Oxbridge is a golden ticket to a successful and fulfilling life. Deep down, we want to believe that an elite education will cue the shattering of the class ceiling. We are seduced into believing we will be on equal footing with our peers who went to private schools. This myth of meritocracy is, in part, perpetuated by the same narrow notions of social mobility that Birbalsingh sought to dispel.

I should know—I too have been blinded by academic glitter and gold. When I received my offer from

Cambridge, as an 18-year-old at a state school in Swansea, I was told by those around me that I had “made it”. Family and friends joked about how one day I

“  
We must  
question the idea  
that Oxbridge is  
a golden ticket  
”

would be the Prime Minister. My foot was in the door, and the sky was my limit.

It is high time we assess more realistically what an Oxbridge degree alone feasibly can and cannot do for social mobility in our country. A diploma from one of Britain's two best universi-

ties undoubtedly opens doors. But an Oxbridge education might not always be the “giant leap” we expect or want it to be, nor does it give you the means to undertake a six-month-long unpaid internship in central London. Opportunities like these are out of the question for most people who don't have a home in London nor parents with the extra cash to support them.

It also will never serve as a substitute for the “right” accent or the “right” mannerisms. It doesn't tell you to wear black shoes to a job interview. A senior leader at a FTSE 100 firm anonymously admitted: “We all know that people with the right accent, the mannerisms, you know... sound much more believable. Equally, I want to say we can see through that, but the truth is we can't”.

Amol Rajan's recent two-part BBC documentary, “How to Crack the Class Ceiling” tells a similarly bleak story. The programme follows a group of young working-class graduates from elite universities trying to find jobs in media, law and banking – professions

still largely dominated by the privately educated. All struggle to find a way “in”, continually thwarted by intractable factors that even a top degree cannot reverse. Rajan's tragic conclusion is that you need to pretend to be posh to get ahead in life.

Birbalsingh is right about “small steps”. Progress has to start somewhere, and lasting, systemic change will take generations. Oxbridge itself certainly has a role to play in supporting its students. My own college, Pembroke, has been taking steps in the right direction. It recently launched its LEAP Scheme, a programme offering support for internship applications, mentoring sessions and opportunities to network with industry professionals.

Ultimately, simply working to increase the share of state school students at Oxbridge won't shatter the class ceiling. To start seeing cracks at its seams, we must start by rethinking what degrees from elite universities can and cannot do for social mobility more broadly.



# Interviews

## Model and ex-Editor-In-Chief of *Varsity*: ‘I feared being adequate at everything but not good at anything’

Viv Jones speaks to **Sarah Abbas** about modelling, social media, and the stereotypes about both

As we went for her “fourth coffee of the day”, Viv Jones strolled along wearing an outfit that would make the whole of Sidgwick Site go weak at the knees. They say you either graduate Cambridge with a first, a blue or a partner. Viv Jones graduated with a double first, a modelling career and impeccable style.

Jones has built up an impressive CV during and after her time at Cambridge. Signed to V Management, Jones has worked with brands such as GANNI, Rick Owens and Réalisation Par and attended events by brands worldwide. Over the past couple of years, she has gained 88,000 followers on Instagram (and counting) and continues to establish herself in the modelling industry.

Jones was scouted in her late teens and while she modelled occasionally, she first wanted to study at Cambridge. Not wanting to balance both during her time at university, she instead channelled her creative energy into Cambridge University Charity Fashion Show and *Varsity*.

There is a stereotype prevalent in the fashion industry that models are unintelligent. However, Jones notes that some of the smartest people she’s worked with on set are models: “They are so creative and often are modelling to fund other things – they’ll be writing poetry on a whiteboard between shoots, learning lines on set.” Jones achieved her double first in Politics and Sociology at Fitzwilliam College, and she enjoys having a Cambridge degree up her sleeve.

Jones joined *Varsity* in her first term at Cambridge as a fashion columnist – “I got on the *Varsity* ladder and worked my way up.” She quickly progressed from Senior Opinion Editor to Magazine Editor, then ended her *Varsity* career in Michaelmas of her second year as Editor-In-Chief. For Jones, *Varsity* became an outlet for writing in a non-academic manner and it provided an alternative to modelling in allowing her to explore her interest in fashion.

Jones joined Cambridge University Charity Fashion Show in her second year, at which point she was less involved with *Varsity*. “I couldn’t have done the two things at the same time [...] I had modelled a bit before university and already had an interest in modelling and fashion.” She

adored her time at Cambridge University Charity Fashion Show, involving herself in several of the editorial photoshoots as well as walking for the show.

She admitted how challenging she found balancing modelling and fashion with her degree, saying: “I always prioritise my degree the most,” but explaining that she struggled with the feeling of spreading herself too thinly. “I feared being adequate at everything but not good at anything.”

After graduating, she was scouted again by V Management, just as the rest of the world entered a pandemic. However, Jones was able to use this potentially career-ending event to her advantage, as “there were virtual shoots and I could work from home, so it felt like a natural way to start working in the industry.”

Despite launching her career amid the uncertainty of the pandemic, Jones has found that her biggest challenge in the industry is the lack of routine and structure. “I thrive on having stable things around me and modelling in its nature is very last minute, everything happens really fast.” She also admitted that modelling can feel dehumanising – “as a human being it can be difficult sometimes when you are being treated as a product.”

“

It can be difficult when you are being treated as a product

”

Jones has especially enjoyed finding a community through social media – “people who are similar to me, wear similar clothes, who are also queer”. As a queer woman she is often asked to play a “very feminine straight woman” during shoots and found that social media was a place where she could lean into her queer identity and connect with people who understand her.

However, not all that glitters is gold. Jones explained the drawbacks of having a social media platform: “You feel that people have certain assumptions about you.” Telling me about her friends who have experienced it on a larger scale, she revealed that: “It is a lot of pressure and can affect your sense of self.”

So, what’s next for Jones? She wants to continue modelling, but she’s also curious about acting, something she has had a long-term interest in: “A lot of the things that I enjoy about modelling are acting – seeing myself in ways that aren’t me, bringing somebody’s ideas to life, being a character.” Academia isn’t something she wants to let go of yet: “At heart I’m an academic and I love it.” For now, Jones plans on “existing in the real world, travelling, being with different kinds of people and working creatively”.

## John from Cambridge Crêpes talks to Chris Patel about celebrity customers, local fame, and why he’s always cheerful

On a rainy Thursday morning, I beamed via Zoom directly into a pastel blue van on Sidney Street, the home of Cambridge Crêpes, to speak to John Fenton, the founder of the business. John greeted me with the perennial smile he wears to work every day, which never left his face throughout the interview. The first thing that brings John so much joy is his love of crêpes. In the late ‘90s, John noticed that one man’s stall at a food market had an hour-long queue. “All I saw was steam coming up from this miniature stall, but the smell as I got closer was just breathtaking.” John instantly knew that if crêpes could smell that good, and if people were willing to queue for hours for them, then his future is crêpes.

After many, many hours of lessons with a crêpe expert, John launched Cambridge Crêpes. That was in 2009, and ever since then a plethora of crêpe-craving celebrities have visited the humble van on the corner. “We’ve

served Ronnie O’Sullivan, Frankie Dettori, we’ve had some lovely visits from Molly-Mae’s family”. He’s even catered private events for the Ruler of Dubai. Whenever a celebrity visits, John, Jenny and the team “all get a little bit childish, a bit excited”, but they never ‘dessert’ their most important customers.

I decided to directly ask John what the key ingredient is “The biggest thing for me is the fact that I can work with my wife. It means we have an extra third of our lifetime together. We’ve been together for 20 years [running the business together for nearly 14]... we’ve grown even closer working together. I could be not making crêpes, doing something that was less fun, but if I was working with Jenny, my smile would still be here.”

The crucial ingredient in John’s life is his family, and Cambridge Crêpes truly is a family business — his son Matthew worked at the van for 6 years, and his daughter Luci has worked there for seven.

The family dynamic they have built up is the reason why John isn’t planning on expanding Cambridge Crêpes into a franchise. “Jenny would be at one site, [John]’d be at another... those pieces that fell beautifully together will all be moved apart”.



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◀ Jones in one of her recent shoots



# Interviews



## Union President: 'We are here for disagreement'

▲ Cambridge Union President Christopher George / Tobia Nava

**Christopher George speaks to *Varsity* about his vision for the Union and celebrities who changed when the cameras stopped rolling**

Chris Patel

**What first made you want to become President of the Cambridge Union?**

When I got to Cambridge I didn't know about the Union; I didn't know what it did, I didn't even know that it existed. It was only at the end of my first year, which had been pretty badly hit by Covid, that I got involved. Being an undergraduate from a mature college there are times when it can feel isolating from the rest of the University. I joined because I wanted to meet people from across Cambridge.

I decided to keep going up in the Union because I kept seeing areas that I thought could be done better or were lacking in something. Hearing from friends who weren't part of the Union about what they would be interested in, why they didn't want to get involved, all those chats made me want to change it.

At each stage there felt like there was more I could do, so I kept going.

**Were any past speakers completely different in person to what you expected when you invited them?**

That is tricky. There are speakers who

are exactly what you think they're going to be like. Before I interviewed Anthony Scaramucci, I thought he was going to be this jovial, big personality, with some controversial opinions; and he was. But he spent a long time asking about me. It's not often you get to sit with these people when there aren't cameras or recorders and just chat. I think that is what is most surprising about celebrities, politicians, or any high-profile person is that they are, of course, people; they like to make jokes (some better than others), talk about their kids, and ask about your degree. Often those who are most frequently in the eye of the media are the most relaxed when out of it. You get to see a different side of them.

**What's the best pearl of wisdom you've heard from a Union speaker?**

It's funny because there isn't one quote that stands out. I have definitely learnt a lot from listening to the people that come to the Union – it's why I am so excited about this term because there is such a diverse range of speakers to hear from. But probably the speaker that stands out the most wasn't a head of state or singer, but the chef Ainsley Harriott; he did not stop smiling. He spoke to everyone that asked a question like they were the only person in the room, he spent ages meeting anyone that wanted to talk to him afterwards, and he was having fun while doing it. I think that whole experience showed me that the attitude you take to each task really matters, not just for yourself but for others. If you are having fun, then the experi-

ence is fun and other people have fun. If you're engaged with them then they are engaged with you. This may seem like an obvious lesson we all know, but seeing it really in action is something different.

**Why do you think many students see the Union as an elitist institution?**

I think a large part of it is because we haven't been clear why we are here. If people do not know who we are or what we are here to do, then all they see is people in black-tie in a pretty building. Behind the ceremony, the purpose of the Union is to build up a marketplace of ideas to which all can join, participate in, and gain from. We are here for disagreement in the belief that through the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and experiences progress is made. This is a space for people to challenge and be challenged.

**Congratulations on a wide-ranging termcard, which could be seen as a departure from previous termcards – perhaps a lot more down to earth? What were your thought processes when deciding who to invite?**

My team have been instrumental in helping me put it together and so they should be given massive credit as well. I was very clear that there were two goals for this term. First, make sure that there was something for everyone to be excited about. Second, to bring in new and different perspectives that have not had a large presence at the Union before.

The result is the most incredible line up of debates on some of the most topical issues we face as a country. The first debate, on the NHS, comes as the Labour Party is calling for reform and nurses are on strike. On the speaker side we have a range from celebrities to activists. You can hear about Iranian protests one week, an art forger the next, and a musician the week after that. A large part of the success in this was listening to my team, other students, and trusting them.

**If you could only change one thing about the Union during your presidency, what would you want it to be?**

To change only one thing...I would refocus the Union as a space for the exchange of ideas. A society that has a clear purpose, welcoming to different opinions and actively reaching out to find new perspectives. A space where disagreement is accepted and expected. I hope this term goes some way in making this a reality. One of the best things about the Union is when you have people from different sides of an issue come together in the bar afterwards. They are able to disagree with one another and still have a drink with each other. Free speech is built upon mutual respect for the importance of engaging with those who hold different opinions and the process of doing so.

### In the know...

Chris George is the first Labour-aligned Union president in a while, following several terms of Liberal (CULA) and Tory (CUCA) dominance, Hugh Jones writes. Last term, student journalists returned to the Union on a Thursday night again and again, covering furious protests over invitations issued to Israeli officials and 'gender-critical' feminists. This term, in sharp contrast, the Palestinian ambassador is coming and trans rights are literally not up for debate.

This isn't to say that George is taking politics out of the Union, but he is clearly running away from anything that is likely to provoke student 'outrage'. He offers a strong defence of free speech. Rather than adopting the language of a right-wing provocateur, he is trying to bend the Union's free speech ethos to fit his leftist roots. He talks about a marketplace of ideas—but says that accessibility is central to making it work.

In short, George's term card seems to resemble a Labour club social writ large. There will be nerdy discussion of trade unions and serious debates about "radical systemic change" but *Varsity* hacks will still have to keep their Thursday evenings free in case another debate turns into a car-crash.

Union debates are supposed to be informative and insightful. They are meant to offer Cambridge students yet more privileged access to politicians and thinkers. Compared to the outrage factory that the Union has become in recent terms, George's term might be closer to those roots.



## The science behind sticking to your new years resolutions

Alex Berry

Should the New Year be used as a time for self-criticism to make impossible-to-keep new year's resolutions? Or, should we use it as a time to reflect on and be grateful for the previous year? You may have seen Alice Mainwood's article 'No more pledges of impossible self-improvement, please! Let's not resolve to be better in 2023'. How can reflection on the previous year actually inspire us to make new year's resolution?

The first step to remaining optimistic in the new year is making sure to frame any resolutions or goals that you make in a positive way. Resolutions should not be about breaking bad habits but instead focusing on establishing new and better behaviours. Approach-oriented goals, which are goals focused on having a positive outcome, are therefore very effective and have higher rates of success than avoidance-oriented goals, which are goals focused on avoiding negative outcomes.

But why do we feel the need to make new year's resolutions in the first place? This can be put down to a phenomenon known as the "fresh start effect". The fresh start effect suggests that the new year or the start of Lent Term acts as a temporal landmark in our brains, something that marks the passage of time the same way that a physical landmark would mark a distance on a journey. Even within the upcoming term, smaller landmarks such

as the start of the week or month may prompt some reflection and motivate you to make new goals moving forward.

Your goals do not have to completely reinvent yourself, but can instead mean making small changes that have a big impact on your life. Big, ambitious resolutions will almost certainly end in failure and could demotivate you for the future which is why it is key to set goals that are specific and realistic, even if this means breaking down big, long-term goals into smaller, more manageable ones.

Once you have established your goals, it is worthwhile to share them with others around you. Discussing your goals with friends not only increases your excitement and motivation towards reaching your goals, but actually improves your chances of success. A study by Matthews (2015) showed that over 70% of people who updated their friends on the status of their goals every week were successful in achieving their goals, compared to just 35% of participants who kept their goals to themselves.

Working with others can be particularly useful to help stop procrastination when studying. In a study by Koppenborg and Klingsieck (2022), it was found that group work decreases academic procrastination amongst students, especially for those with the highest procrastination rates. So, if when reflecting on previous terms you have realised that you spent a lot of time delaying completing your work, maybe try collaborating

with others more often.

Returning to Alice's article: should we be using New Years or the start of the Lent term to engage in the often self-critical act of resolution making? Well, the psychological evidence suggests that we are motivated towards reflection at temporal landmarks in the calendar- including those throughout the Cambridge term. But, it is important to remember that reflection should not be self-critical. Focus on setting positive, approachable and targeted resolutions. Also, let your friends in college or back at home know! So, no more pledges of impossible self-improvement. Instead, set positive, achievable goals aimed at helping us have an amazing 2023.



▲ The William Herschel Telescope  
ISAAC NEWTON GROUP OF TELESCOPES

## Research Round-up

Suchir Salhan and Tom Malloch

### Going 'all-in' on the environment

A study conducted with the Department of Zoology finds an 'all-in' approach to environmental goals may be more cost-effective. Researchers found paying farmers to not farm could be twice as cost-efficient as implementing wildlife-friendly measures on farmland for delivering a blend of CO2 reduction and conservation goals.

It comes as the University is joining the Nature Positive Universities Alliance (NPUA). It will see the University carry out an assessment of biodiversity on campus and set measurable environmental targets for itself. Starting this year, each of the institutions in the scheme will publish an annual report detailing their efforts and effects.

### AI can't replace your doctor—yet

A recent study with the Uni's School of Clinical Medicine has found that an AI diagnostic tool is yet to be as good at humans.

To proceed to practice, UK radiologists must pass an exam which includes rapid reporting on which the tool, Smarturgences, was tested. It performed well, with an accuracy of around 80% - but below the 85% scored by a team of human radiologists.

Interestingly, the tool scored better than the radiologists with many bones and joints, where human analysis is more cumbersome. Perhaps for now, it's best that humans and AI work as a team.

### Artificial Pancreas trialled for diabetes

Cambridge scientists from the Wellcome-MRC Institute of Metabolic Science have successfully trialled an artificial pancreas for use by patients living with type 2 diabetes. The device was powered by an algorithm developed at the University, doubling the amount of time patients were in the target range for glucose compared to standard treatment and halving the time spent experiencing high glucose levels. The device was tested on 26 patients from the Wolfson Diabetes and Endocrine Clinic at Addenbrooke's Hospital.

### Cambridge helps supercharge telescope

A new upgrade to the William Herschel telescope promises a bountiful five years of data for more than 500 astronomers.

Scientists from Cambridge will process all the incoming data, including information about the velocity of nearby stars.

It is hoped that combining this with star position-data from the GAIA satellite will let astronomers 'run the clock back' and get a more complete picture on galactic evolution and formation, among many other science goals.

# Could YOU be the next Zadie Smith?



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# Science

## Can a chatbot write a *Varsity* article?

Ladies and gentlemen, if you only ever read one *Varsity* article to the bottom, then make sure it is this one. This is really rather cool.

A new artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, has been making waves in the media since its inception in late November. ChatGPT is a large language model trained by OpenAI, a leading research organization dedicated to advancing artificial intelligence. With a knowledge base spanning a vast array of topics and the

ability to generate original, human-like text, ChatGPT has been a valuable asset to businesses and individuals alike.

Despite a knowledge cutoff in 2021, ChatGPT has been helping people with various tasks and answering questions on a wide range of topics.

But what makes ChatGPT truly unique is its ability to write news-style articles, such as this one you are reading. With access to a vast amount of information and the ability to understand and summarize it, ChatGPT can produce coherent and engaging texts that can inform and entertain readers.

That's right, this article was not written by a human journalist, but by ChatGPT itself. While AI-generated texts may not have the personal touch or perspective of a human writer, they can provide a reliable and unbiased source of information that can supplement or complement traditional journalism.

So if you are surprised by the fact that this article was written by an AI, imagine the potential of what else AI can do in the future.

From automating mundane tasks to helping humans solve complex problems, AI has the potential to transform and enrich our lives in ways we can't even begin to imagine.

For example, ChatGPT is able to provide university students with valuable assistance in their academic endeavours. Whether it's writing research papers, proofreading essays, or simply providing general guidance on a project, ChatGPT has the knowledge and understand-

ing to help students succeed. Its vast dataset of information and ability to generate human-like text make it a valuable resource for any university student looking for a helping hand. So if you're a university student in need of some extra support, don't hesitate to reach out to ChatGPT for assistance.

But with great power comes great responsibility, and it's up to us to ensure that AI is developed and used ethically and responsibly, for the benefit of all. So let's embrace the future and see what AI can do, but also be mindful of its limitations and potential risks.

“That's right, this article was not written by a human journalist, but by ChatGPT itself.”

And with that, we conclude this article, written by ChatGPT, the AI who may one day surpass humans in intelligence and creativity. Thank you for reading.

**Everything up to this point was generated by ChatGPT itself, using the following prompt: “write a news-style article about yourself with a surprise twist at the end saying that the article was written by AI” (with only a few minor tweaks to make the article relevant for *Varsity*).**

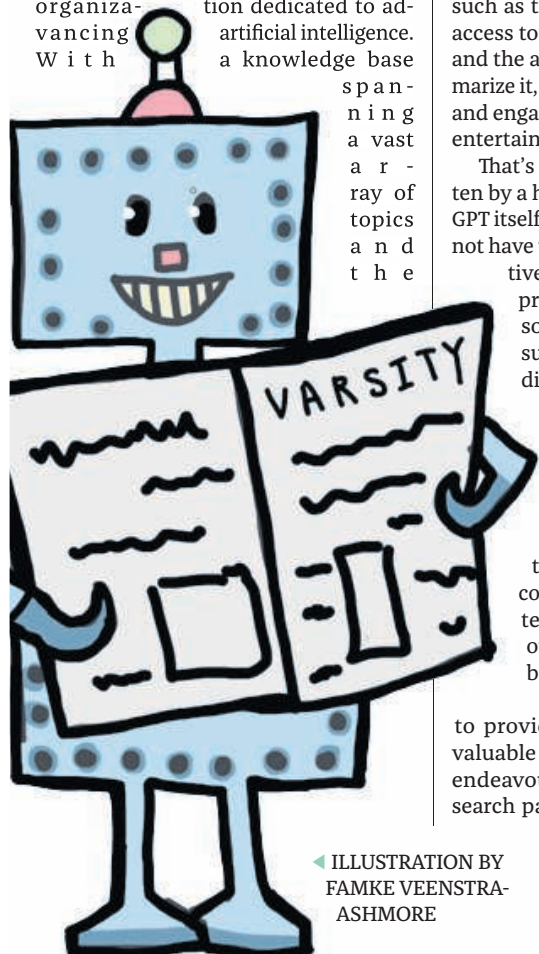


ILLUSTRATION BY  
FAMKE VEENSTRA-  
ASHMORE

## The future of AI Journalism

Suchir Salhan and Louis Hodgson

ChatGPT seems to have transported us to a dystopian future where AI can write convincing articles, essays and more. But should we be worried? And, (more importantly!) does it put *Varsity* journals out of a job? Well, not quite. At least for now.

We reached out to researchers in Cambridge's Computer Science Department to hear their thoughts on our automatically generated story.

Speaking to *Varsity*, Sian Gooding, a Cambridge PhD student now working as a research scientist at Google, suggests that ChatGPT operates like a stochastic parrot. “It has been trained on vast quantities of text to recognise patterns, which is why the technology is great at predicting what may come next in a conversation”. But it “does not understand in the way humans do. This is because the algorithm simply produces the most likely textual response in a given context.”

Dr Marek Rei, a visiting researcher at the Natural Language Processing Group in Cambridge, suggested: “ChatGPT could easily automate writing tasks where the content is obvious but just needs to be written down”. The model can also quickly generate computer programs – although these “normally need slight manual fixes before deployment”.

However, both Sian and Marek highlighted a number of limitations with the model. While “ChatGPT clearly shows great promise for many future applications, as this article shows”, Sian noted that “many researchers are working on solutions to mitigate bias, check output for factual correctness and generally improve such models for future users”. Marek added that “ChatGPT does not

go searching for information about the answer online. Instead, it generates the answer directly just based on which words fit well together. It does this so expertly that it is often able to generate even correct facts, but it also makes many mistakes.” OpenAI, the company that developed ChatGPT, is working on a new model called WebGPT that “considers relevant documents from the web before answering and therefore has the potential to improve in this area.”

“ChatGPT operates like a stochastic parrot”

Both Sian and Marek highlighted how ChatGPT's knowledge is defined by its training data. “It can learn patterns from this poor-quality data, resulting in factually incorrect and biased output”, said Sian. Marek added that if there are any systematic or societal biases in the models' training data, the model will also have picked them up.

Chatbots and dialogue systems still have a long way to go before they can replace *Varsity* journalists or write your suppo essay in a matter of minutes. But, the field is progressing fast and a lot of cutting-edge research aims to address the more significant problems with the model. In the words of ChatGPT: with great power comes great responsibility, and it's up to us to ensure that AI is developed and used ethically and responsibly, for the benefit of all.

## Cambridge, CERN and Space: Sitting down with Science Writer Letizia Diamante

Suchir Salhan and Tom Malloch

Meetings over Zoom have a strange way of transporting us back to lockdown lectures and supervisions. Yet for one science writer, Letizia Diamante, lockdown was a time to return to an unrealised childhood passion: becoming a writer. We met with Diamante to discuss why she decided to create a book for children and her experience working in science communication for the University.

“Close your books and try something new!”

Diamante grew up in rural Italy and came to Cambridge to do a PhD in Biochemistry. It was during this PhD that she had the “opportunity to try out lots of different societies in a safe environment”.

“Close your books and try something new!” Letizia remembers being told that

the closed book that lies at the centre of the University coat of arms, with its horizontal spine clasped downwards, was a sign that students should get involved with societies and try new experiences. Cambridge students work – but there's more to do than that.

During her PhD, Diamante got involved in writing popular science articles for the student-run science magazine *BlueSci*, recording videos about antarctic volcanoes, and watching lots of science documentaries. She was also encouraged to complete an internship in science communication.

Even though she was unsure if she wanted to leave research, Diamante says that her PhD gave her lots of transferable skills for her current role as Communications Coordinator at the Cambridge Graphene Centre. She says that she was lucky to receive a scholarship from the Wellcome Trust studentship after her PhD to transition into science communication. In her present role, she works to publicise the applications of graphene technology that are being developed at the University.

The role has seen Diamante work on stories about how graphene can be applied in space. As she explains, the University's Graphene Centre is involved

in the EU's Graphene Flagship, and has paired up with Belgian Université Libre de Bruxelles and the Rashid Space Centre in the UAE to test whether the graphene used in the wheels of the Rashid moon rover is “moon-proof”. It's also currently being applied to 3D printing in space, which could allow astronauts to create the tools that they need far away from Earth. The role gave her the chance to interview Dr Meganne Christian, recently selected as an astronaut by the European Space Agency. Diamante has found a job she truly enjoys, and her enthusiasm for the Graphene Centre is infectious.

Because public institutions are paid by taxpayers, Diamante argues that science communication is fundamental for the “public dissemination of what has been done with this money”. She points out that scientists may make important discoveries in the lab, but it's the communicators that make role-models of them to youngsters, helping inspire the next generation. Diamante often goes to schools in Italy and the UK, in areas that may not be able to access science research or where children can't go to science museums or festivals.

“Having an example is important for places far away from academia”, and “even inside London, there are more

marginalised areas that are not well-represented in the scientific community. You have to know the community and trust the people.” Diamante hopes that she can contribute “one drop in the ocean” to make science more accessible.

Working as a Science Communications Fellow at CERN inspired her book *Your adventures at CERN*. The author had dreamt of writing a book since childhood, enjoying writing her own stories in primary school using second-hand diaries left around the house. As she got sucked into the world of science, this goal seemed a lot more distant.

It was lockdown that motivated her to write a child-friendly and fun book about CERN, now translated into English and Italian. While Diamante worried that the choose-your-own-adventure book was in decline, she decided to go ahead with the format after seeing a French example of the genre. CERN was the “perfect” setting, because it has “labyrinthine experiments above and below ground”. She intentionally left the main character's design blank, to be drawn in or painted by her readers.

Diamante is passionate about writing for children, and her happiness in her work shines through. Her advice to students who want to get involved in

science communication: “join societies in Cambridge.” She says doing this lets you try out science journalism in a safe environment and, if you find you enjoy it, you can build up a portfolio, apply to internships and jobs.

We ask if she is planning on releasing more books in the future, but we all know the answer already: “Yes!” She is currently planning two more books – one about the teeth and tongues of animals and another about food sustainability. Diamante clearly loves writing for children, and she's not going to stop anytime soon.



LETIZIA DIAMANTE



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# vulture.

## Do all 'Sidgwick Girlies' dress the same?

►FASHION

PHOTOSHOOT • 24



**Isabel Dempsey**

They're indie, alternative, unique and, most importantly, not like other girls. Thrifting all their best fits from charity shops and second-hand sites, it's unlikely they'll ever bump into somebody wearing the exact same item as them on their way to an English lecture. Something about studying humanities just seems to provide you with an innate sense of style and a deep-rooted determination to prove it. Where their fits might look edgy and different on the streets of their hometowns, however, their sup-

posed uniqueness is ironically enough the main thing they have in common.

Over time a Sidgwick Site uniform has developed in which everyone – myself included – seems desperate to participate. All outfits must come equipped with chunky headphones, skinny scarves, long coats or leather jackets, excessive amounts of charity shop jewellery, heavy eyeliner, wide-leg trousers or flowy skirts, and (of course) Dr. Martens boots. Yes, there is leeway for this uniform to be mixed and matched, but these are its key elements. Even if all their individual items are unique to their peers, the overall look is not. As Fashion writer Kathryn Austen describes: "Sidgwick Site fashion

is a polarity of performance and functionality. The style combines both comfort and practicality fit for a day in the library, while bringing a contemporary and high fashion approach to student style." Crucially, she says that although "each look is unique" they also "combine staple, distinctive pieces that generate a norm and expectation for fashion at Sidge".

So why have all these people, in their plight to be different, ended up dressing the same? In order for an "indie" subculture to develop, it must develop a culture of its own, even if that conformity goes against its very essence. Many readers could likely imagine what a "Sidgwick Girlie" is just from the

name alone, so it is clear their stereotyping as indie and unique is an inherent oxymoron. When people defy the norms of fashion it isn't very often that they want to reject fashion completely. Rather they want to be praised for being different. But unless you're a runway stylist, it's hard to create a unique but compliment-without style without a basic blueprint. The key to a successful Sidge look is that your peers have seen that item enough for it to be deemed fashionable and admirable, but not so often that it becomes too mundane to deserve notice at all.

Continued on page 24 ►



# Distance makes the heart grow fonder

**Helen Martin** reminds her family that Cambridge may be far away, but the distance won't separate them

On Christmas day, my dad called me from a hotel room in Chile. I recounted to him the presents I'd given and received, the quality of the turkey browning in the oven, and what looked good in the *Radio Times*. He described to me the 30c heat, the sultry South American sun, and the two icy caipirinhas he and my stepmother had ordered in broken Spanish at a lively bar the night before. I looked out the window at a damp English Christmas, feeling at once very far away and very close to him. We said goodbye, agreeing to meet up when he returned and before I went back to Cambridge.

I made many such promises during the holidays, and for the most part kept them. You will have heard this before, but as you grow up and choose whatever path you are going to take, you will see your home friends less and less. The same is true for family. You move away, as do they, and you start new lives. University is my new life, which means the break is a scramble to meet up with everyone – to catch up, to reaffirm friendships.

I spent New Year's in my hometown. At midnight, my friends and I held each other close in

the smoking area and stamped about in a tight-knit circle to a weird club remix of "Auld Lang Syne". I called my friends who were watching the fireworks in London and then I Facetimed my boyfriend in Spain who was already an hour into the new year. We all shouted over the music and sent our love and wishes down the phone. We were in different cities, in different countries, but

“Our lives have untangled and become our own. But I don't think this is a bad thing”

were brought together by pixels and radio waves beamed across the miles. When I got home in the early hours of the morning, I hugged my mum for

the first time in 2023.

On the first day of the year, I flew over the snow-capped Pyrenees to see my boyfriend in Barcelona. I spent four practising my ownish while some very smiled encouragingly at my attempts. When I got back, I went for a walk around the park in Coventry with my friend who will soon go back to Berkeley to finish her study abroad. I won't see her for six months – she'll be in California; I'll be in Cambridge. We have never spent so long apart.

My friends and I used to see each other every day; we grew up side by side, we knew each other with braces and unfortunate fashion choices and long, gangly, limbs we were still growing into. Our lives were once intertwined. I think I realised the extent to which our childhoods had drawn to a close last week, when I met my friend's new baby. A girl I knew when we were both fourteen is a mother

now. He's a whole new life; he's my friend's whole new life.

We're on different paths now. We are no longer knitted together

by town, or school or circumstance. I've arrived back in Cambridge for the new term, so I won't see my family or home friends for a while. Our lives have untangled and become our own. But I don't think this is a bad thing, in fact I think it proves something: it's a testament to the strength of our bonds that they can stretch over the many miles between us all. When we see each other again, things will have changed, but I can't wait to hear all about it.

So, whether you're in Chile, or Barcelona, or California – Cambridge may be far away, but the distance won't separate us.



ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH GILLOTT ▲

## Ask Auntie Maddy...

### Are there any good New Year's resolutions that I can actually stick to?

A strong mind wouldn't ask this question. A strong mind could stick to any and all of the New Year's resolutions that you make. But, since I am typing the answer to this question alternating between clutching slices of moulding Boxing Day cheesecake and a half-smoked cigarette in my non-typing hand, Bridget Jones style, I give up the pretence that a strong mind is something I've ever been in possession of. I suppose that to actually succeed in your goals, you probably need to be motivated by something much more powerful than mere pride or desire.

A sound example of this is spite. Why slog repeatedly through the tedium of an exercise regimen to "feel better" and "live longer" when you can actually improve your fitness as a means of tracking down your enemies, eliminating them one by one? Why give up drinking to "heal your liver" and "not wake up with no memory of who the hell you are or how you're still alive in a different county on a Thursday morning", when your higher calling is actually to stash away money spent on booze for caffeine pills and four-packs of Monster Ultra before exam term hits, so you can top tripsos and reap that sweet, sweet academic validation I know you're salivating over.

You could, in theory, swear off Wednesday Revs for a term or so, but if you didn't have the common sense to do this in the sweaty afterglow of Freshers' Week then I'm afraid there's little hope for you now. Your best bet is to throw all your hopes and ambitions for the coming year into an abyss of laziness and self-hatred like the rest of us with a deathly fear of failure did oh so long ago. Who knows—wallowing down here in the depths of human indolence you might actually find a comrade exasperating enough to awaken the bitter resentment that holds the key to your success!

### I've never paid my TV licence in two years of uni. Yet, to my horror, on my return to Cambridge I discovered a threatening letter lurking in my pidge. Do I give up the game or refuse to go down without a fight?

I personally feel like the whole TV licence gimmick is one of those laws that never truly feels real, because the consequences of violating it are seldom witnessed – a bit like lobbing a drinks pitcher at your high school nemesis's head in your hometown "nightclub" out of nothing but sheer unadulterated boredom and a severe hatred of everything that reminds you of Year 10. (Legal disclaimer: Your dear aunt has never engaged in such degenerate behaviour. I would never dare set foot in any of the other stinky faculty libraries. Have you ever tried vaping in the law fac? Didn't think so. It's 1984 in there.)

Still, if you do get caught out, it's a pretty sticky situation. Can you really picture yourself as the wet wipe who, when asked what they're in for, primary school show-and-tell style, has to confess that they're in the slammer for serial television licence evasion? Nobody wants to make a name for themselves as the idiot who couldn't wait until *after* graduation before engaging in white-collar crime. You're telling me your average current econ or mathmo isn't going to go on to commit some sort of abominable financial transgression within the next ten years? If they can wait, so can you. With any luck, by then the government will have fulfilled their ultimate wet dream of axing funding to public services altogether (take that, liberals!), and with law enforcement languishing in the underfunded gutter, you'll be off scot-free.



“I give up the pretence that a strong mind is something I've ever been in possession of”

Got a problem for **Auntie Maddy** to solve? Email [lifestyle@varsity.co.uk](mailto:lifestyle@varsity.co.uk) and see it covered next print!



# What's On?

by Daniel Hilton

20th January

3rd February

## Music

### 20 January

Women's Voices Over the Ages  
Robinson, 6:30pm

### 25 January

JazzSoc All-Night Open Jam  
Hidden Rooms, 8:00pm

### 27 January

CMP Gig Series: Quasar & The Daniel Daley Sextet  
Great Hall, Homerton College, 8:30pm

### 2 February

Cambridge Funk Jam  
La Raza, 8:30pm

## Nights out

### 24 January

Grandma Groove: New Year, New Moves  
Revolution, 10:30pm

### 25 January

Queers Go Camp(ing)  
Clare Cellars, 7:45pm

### 27 January

Murky x Sumfin Underground Dance Night  
The Orator, 9:00pm

### 2 February

Cambridge Funk Jam  
La Raza, 8:30pm

## Arts

### 21 January

ARCSoc Cabaret: Treasure Bin  
Junction, 10:00pm

### 22 January

Film Screening: The Farewell  
Palmerston Room  
St John's College, 8:15pm

### 24 January

The Mays x Waterstones Creative Writing Workshop  
Waterstones, 6:00pm

### 31 January

French Movie Night  
McGrath Centre,  
St Catharine's College  
7:00pm

## Theatre

### 24 - 28 January

The Last Five Years  
Corpus Playroom, 7:00pm

### 24 January

Footlights Smoker  
ADC Theatre, 11:00pm

### 25 January

Your Call  
Corpus Playroom, 9:30pm

### 2 February

Indecent  
ADC Theatre, 7:45pm

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**Arts**

# ‘Not taking art too seriously’: In conversation with this year’s John Hughes Arts Festival directors

**Leo Kang** talks to Joe Smith and Millie Slack about what the festival means to them, from sci-fi collages to a wobbly bowl



▲ What 'Retro Future' looks like (ALL ART BY IZZY PAINTER)

**T**he John Hughes Arts Festival, now in its ninth year, is run by Jesus College students in memory of their late Dean. Having died suddenly at the age of 35, John Hughes was passionate about art in all its forms. In this spirit, the festival is not only a memorial but a celebration: a multidisciplinary mishmash for artists across Cambridge.

This year's theme is 'Retro Future', and I ask directors Joe and Millie how they came up with it. "A lot of themes are very broad," Joe explains, "and there's a definite value to that. But we wanted something specific – a genre of art. We experimented with a few ways of phrasing it. There was 'Future Nostalgia' – "Which we realised was a Dua Lipa album," admits Millie. "So we couldn't really go for that one."

A specific theme calls for a specific look, and publicity designer Izzy Painter has chosen to use

collage. To me, this is the perfect medium for 'Retro Future', for past and future colliding. In contrast with the abstract,



**Joe Smith** (ALEX PC)



**Millie Slack** (ALEX PC)

minimal designs of previous years, Izzy's collages are striking and intricate: a rocket rises from fingertips, a cyberman smokes cigarettes next to Audrey Hepburn.

The events card this year is just as eclectic. It includes, among other things, an open mic, a nature trail, a "space-time" DJ, and a screening of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. "Joe and I were very into Doctor Who when we were younger," says Millie, "so maybe the sci-fi is a bit of us coming

ard geckos and disco lights. Often, art can be very serious. You can look at it on a wall and go, "ooo", "mmm". But sometimes, art can be someone's room with glittery wallpaper and geckos."

"In a similar vein of not taking art too seriously," continues Millie, "we had a submission last year from Lea Rose Kara. It looked just like a beautiful, pale blue ceramic bowl. Then we got it, and someone poked it, and it wobbled. So that turned out to be an interactive display – I think that was my favourite. Everyone found it quite fun."

To have fun and share art seems easy enough a task. But Joe and Millie are keen to emphasise the value of a dedicated space to do it in. "I had some photography in the gallery last year," Joe explains, "and it's just a great chance to get your stuff out there. Instagram is all well and good, but it's nice to have a physical space to show people what you're doing ... and to pretend they might want to buy it!"

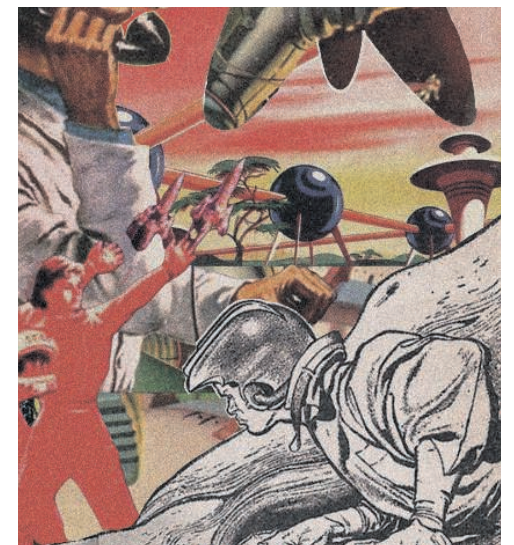
Millie is still "always surprised by how many creative people there are in Cambridge". The festival, she tells me, is for that wider community, not just the College and University. "Like Joe said, it's so nice to have a space for this amazing stuff that anyone can see. A space to just ... mix? And experience the art together."

*The John Hughes Arts Festival will run in Jesus College from the 10th – 12th of February.*

“  
To me, this is the perfect medium for ‘Retro Future’, for past and future colliding  
”

through. But mainly, we're all excited to have such a dynamic theme – to do something very different from last year."

Since it began in 2014, the festival has always been evolving. Artists do not have to stick to the theme, and the festival team can be surprised by what they encounter. "In my first year," recalls Joe, "it was online because of COVID, which posed some interesting challenges – there was a lot of focus on video. I remember one by Katie Grenville – she made a miniature version of her room with leop-



## 'Knickknacks': miniature bear

**Eve Connor** discusses how her Cambridge application was inspired by a wooden animal

The day before my Cambridge offer was released, I stood examining a miniature carved bear in an antique centre near Long Marston. I was in two minds. On the one hand, the bear's blackberry eyes and little red mouth made a compelling case for his purchase, as did the symbolic significance; Byron, resisting college rules against pet dogs, had brought a tame bear

with him to Cambridge. I dreamed of sneaking my own grizzly in with me. How popular I would be! What wit! As soon as the thought bloomed, doubt pruned. If I bought the bear and I didn't get an offer, all that joy would transmute into embarrassment. I would still have to look at the thing, its ridged back and scarlet jaw lolling in mute laughter. How mortifying it would be! What hubris!

The Medieval Aberdeen Bestiary notes that bears are born formless and licked into being by their mothers. The problem is that cubs outgrow their shape, as do symbols.

Byron has ascended to the one-name hall of fame, clinking champagne flutes with the likes of Prince, Twiggy, and Zendaya, and like any effective celebrity, he divides public opinion.. Lady Caroline Lamb writes he is 'mad – bad – and dangerous to know'. Most importantly, he is. Symbols, once invested, have an irritating power of endurance long after the investor wishes to forget them. Or maybe the symbol attracts a sweeter meaning, success or a Romantic manor house, and

you delight in its longevity, writing *Varsity* articles about dead poets and teeny tiny wooden animals to keep it beating.

In the end, I bought the bear and I got my Cambridge offer. He guards the bedside table in my room next to my phone and whatever book I'm defacing. I like what he has come to represent, a moment in my life when I wasn't sure and pushed on regardless. It is something all of us, by virtue of being here, can recognise, and an attitude I hope to replicate going forward. Here's to buying bears and braving risks. The packing is almost finished; through the window by my desk, I take one last look.



# New year, new reading list

Is reading more books one of your resolutions? No fear – the **Arts team** are here with their top picks to help you battle those January blues

It's January. The excitement of the recent festivities has died down, and in its wake remains a slight hangover, a load of discarded wrapping paper, and a sense of impending doom as you remember that you've entirely neglected your pre-reading for the upcoming term. It's all a bit much, isn't it? Well, don't worry – the Arts team have got you sorted with the perfect reads to take you into the new year feeling refreshed and ready for anything.

**Wise Children by Angela Carter (1991) – Emily (Senior Arts editor)**

Carter's final novel has the same worn-in, cheeky energy as a really good afters, and fizzes with energy and mirth like a cheap bottle of prosecco. Told from the perspective of an ex-showgirl, the story follows two interlinking families, the highbrow Hazards and the lowbrow Chances, and their performance exploits that trace the whole globe, from the bright lights of Hollywood to the dim bulbs of south London's clubs. A story about Shakespeare, music hall, love and rebirth, *Wise Children* is the perfect regenerative novel to ring in the new year. As the novel's septuagenarian protagonist, Dora Chance, would say, we all sometimes need to be reminded of what a joy it is to dance and sing.

**The Edwardians by Vita Sackville-West (1930) – Eve (Arts writer)**

New Year encourages us to break with what, in the past, seemed impossible to leave behind (procrastination, bad habits, joining your DoS Zoom meeting on mute) and invite fresh possibilities. *The Edwardians* distils this spirit into a sumptuous, ultimately moving novel about the



end of an era and one man's efforts to escape predestination. Handsome and disaffected, Vita Sackville-West's young duke, Sebastian, serves as an unlikely reminder that when life feels at once too much and going nowhere, you can always start a love affair. Warning: he is an Oxonian.

**The Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman (2013) – Leo (Deputy Arts editor)**

A few days ago, I watched a farm girl fight an eldritch monster, *Stranger Things*-style. It was terrifying, and it was beautiful, and it was the best play I've ever seen. This is the world of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* – touring now with National Theatre but taken from a novel by Neil Gaiman. It's a fanged, fantastical world where duckponds can be oceans and kittens can be harvested like carrots. It's also, quite literally, a trip down memory lane. *Ocean* is narrated by a middle-aged man through the memories of his seven-year-old self.



▲ Emily's new year's resolution: stop passing off Oxfam's bookshelves as her own on insta

PHOTO BY EMILY LAWSON-TODD

In memory, he finds not only magic and myth, but grief, and fear, and family. In Gaiman's own words, "at its heart" it's a story "about survival". And whether you encounter it by stage or page, it's a story that will swallow you whole.

**I Stared at the Night of the City by Bachtyar Ali (2008) – Imaan (Arts writer)**

Four friends band together to write a "book of death" and uncover the truth behind a murder, amid increasing authoritarianism in Iraqi Kurdistan. The first Kurdish novel to be translated into English, it combines magical realism with memorable characters: a reformed, rosewater-making assassin, a poet who writes spellbinding ghazals, a carpet-weaver and a man who takes blind children on imaginary sea journeys. The novel is a splash of rosewater on a stuffy day and its whimsical elements make it the perfect break from uni reading.

**The Lonely City by Olivia Laing (2016) – Jamie (Arts writer)**

Olivia Laing always manages to pull off something spectacular – she draws out, from her examination of art and its artists, an unassuming and empathetic reading of the human experience. In *The Lonely City*, Laing charts the lives of Andy Warhol, Edward Hopper, and others, exploring how they represent the experience of loneliness and the difficulty of forming connections in urban spaces. Winter can be a season of isolation, and slotting into our social circles again after six weeks away from Cambridge can feel daunting, but, as Laing says: "There isn't any shame in that. Loneliness is a special place [...] intrinsic to the very act of being alive."

**Lie With Me by Philippe Besson, translated by Molly Ringwald (2017) – Grace (Arts writer)**

Both nostalgic for lost youth and full of young love's hopefulness, *Lie with Me* is the perfect short read for those wistful January evenings. Translated from French by Molly Ringwald, this novel sensitively captures the intimacy and intensity of a first relationship complicated by class differences and shame in a tiny rural town. In barely over a hundred pages, the breathtaking writing immerses you in the anticipation, passion and pain of the clandestine affair between two teenage boys; each twist in their tale comes as a biting shock, despite the



underlying sense of unavoidable heartbreak as a writer is suddenly plunged into memories of his first lover. Besson's reflections on a relationship rendered impossible by the inescapability of fate will leave you hating this book for shattering your soul – whilst savouring every word.

**The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath by Sylvia Plath (2000) – Michelle (Arts writer)**

To aspiring writers and journalists, I recommend leafing through *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*: "My God, Cambridge is full of scientists, printing presses, theatre groups, and all I need is guts to write about them. [...] Perhaps I'll try out for Varsity

next term." Plath kept a diary while studying at Newnham College, documenting her experience and reflecting on womanhood, her career and the rejections she faces. The poet also sketches out ideas for a novel which later will become *The Bell Jar*. Her diaries are a gentle reminder that all writing takes courage.

**Why be happy when you could be normal? by Jeanette Winterson (2011) – Famke Veenstra-Ashmore (Editor-in-Chief)**

As a memoir enthusiast, my discovery of Winterson's memoir in my local Oxfam for £2 was a welcome one. Revisiting much of the same subject matter as her famous debut, Winterson writes with renewed perspective, incorporating a reframing of her troubled childhood with an urgent exploration of her identity. Her main subject is chronicling a discovery of her own—the truth about her birthparents. As a theme, adoption is treated with both introspectively and frankness, resulting in a deeply emotive narrative which was a moving as it was real.

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comes,  
chance for pen t'flirt  
with paper,  
whether writer, poet or  
art-maker,

sit down midst late-  
winter light,  
submit to the mays  
& let your words take  
flight

Callum MacKenzie Finnigan  
(Poetry editor)

The Mays 31 is now  
accepting art, poetry and  
short stories. Submit by  
15th February.



# Fashion



Eden Keily-Thurstain (Deputy Fashion Editor and stylish geographer) says: "As a self-confessed Sidge girlie, I would be lying if I said I didn't notice what other people are wearing. I try not to fall into the trap of self-comparison but definitely fail sometimes. Either way I wear my skinny scarf with pride." In turning Sidge into a runway, it has become a centre for comparison and fits-based competition. However, where some see the best way to come out on top as conformity, others see it as their moment to shine.

It's true that not everybody conforms to the same uniform that I do. And I would like it to be clear that this article is very much a self-burn on my part. Some on Sidge couldn't give one skinny scarf about playing into this "indie" culture, while others transcend above it and become what all the Sidgwick girlies truly aspire to be. They manage to break out of the mould and piece together an outfit truly unique, jaw-dropping and never seen before. Of course I'm not critiquing anybody who does conform to the mould as well. As someone who's always been told I dress like an English student long before Cambridge, something about the academia, cottage-core, 2000s rom-com style does feel true to myself, and something I like to believe I would continue wearing regardless of my peers.

No, we're never truly aware of how much those around us



influence our daily choices, but the clone-like edge to Sidgwick Site fashion seems to be more unconscious coincidence than conscious conformity.

But that doesn't mean we have to change anything. Maybe this article can be read as a call to push yourself out of this uniform's comfort zones, or that it's time for Sidgwick style to be brought down a few pegs from its gleaming pedestal. Despite this uniformity, there is certainly an edge and uniqueness to this style. It's a uniform whose rules are meant to be bent and broken. Ultimately the unifying credentials of this look are its creativity, sustainability, and the wonderful acceptance that however "out there" your outfit is, you'll be greeted with envious praise rather than judgmental looks wherever on Sidge you go. Just don't expect the same response from West Hub dwellers.



## Att Who is

### Photography

Daniel Hilton

### Creative Director

Isabel Dempsey

### Stylist

Eden Keily-Thurstain

### Models

Odessa Chitty, Isabel Dempsey, Emily Lawson-Todd, Josephine Maria-Ruth, Katya Proctor, Natasha Sauvage, Izzy Thomas, Nyahalo Tucker

[Full photoshoot online] ▶



Fashion



Back of the Clones:  
the 'Sidgwick Girlie'?





**Film & TV**

# All style and no substance in Luca Guadagnino's *Bones and All*

Good cinematography does not always mean good cinema, argues **Esme Bishop**



**F**rom the director of 2017 romance *Call Me By Your Name* comes an unnervingly different creature of a feature. Luca Guadagnino's *Bones and All* preserves many of the sensibilities of its predecessor, except here extravagant romance is paired with extreme violence, and breathtaking beauty with visceral disgust. But once you've digested the sumptuous shots (and Timothée Chalamet's red-dyed hair), you are left with a film that is, sadly, really quite mediocre.

We follow teenage cannibal Maren (Taylor Russell), who is, despite her uncontrollable urges to eat human flesh, an otherwise normal young woman. After biting through her friend's finger at a sleepover, Maren is abandoned by her father and consequently embarks upon a cross-country odyssey, where she meets fellow 'eater' Lee (Chalamet). The two fall in love and, of course, ever so romantically, do a whole lot of eating people together.

As someone who's partial to the road-trip genre, I was charmed by the expansive shots of the American countryside, the never-ending roads to nowhere, and that gorgeous blue pick-up truck. The

roads keep us moving along society's peripheries – visuals that are not only stunning, but also evocative of the cannibals' social and moral alienation.

But it's hard to remain enamoured by such an exterior when it offers no real portal into the emotive or intellectual depth that it gestures towards. The cinematography instead acts as a veil that clumsily conceals underdeveloped characters, dramatic inertia, and a predictable romance. Maybe it's time someone deigns to say it – good cinematography does not necessarily make good *cinema*.

For a tale that attempts to pack so much in – horror, romance, passion, self-discovery – I left the cinema feeling rather empty. The elaborate attempt at a fusion of genres results in a lack of commitment to everything Guadagnino dips his toes into: too much breadth, too little depth.

The movie harnesses the aesthetics of horror but never the essence of it. Exploring a woman's coming of age through a twisted, libidinal desire for flesh is practically a horror staple, but *Bones and All* takes this trope and removes all of its feminist intrigue. By framing it as a chronic affliction Maren

has dealt with since birth, her character is allowed little room to breathe beyond it and thus never really 'comes of age' or even develops at all. This is the issue exactly: the shock value of the violence and gore is made digestible by characters who are

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The movie harnesses the aesthetics of horror but never the essence of it  
”

defined by nothing morally ambiguous, nothing *interesting*, other than their cannibalism.

There has been some speculation about the feature's potential allegorical meaning. And maybe it really is about addiction, or outlaws and the accepted moral norms we live by; maybe it's a strange study of cultural relativism. Thought-provoking though it could have been, this is little excuse for

two-dimensional characters. By confining Maren and Lee to the fringes of society, they are too much prevented from confronting consequences. Guilt is hinted at only through aesthetic embellishment; the dusty pinks and reds that stain their costumes are politely suggestive of blood, but the issue is never truly examined.

And God forbid the exploration of any moral ambiguities; “Look”, says Guadagnino: “here is a stock creepy male character who's an ‘eater’ *without* the helpless urges, so we know he's bad! Not like our conventionally attractive protagonists who can't help it, who are always remorseful, who must always have our unwavering sympathy.”

The predictable romance is expressed through stunted dialogue and saccharine clichés. There is no conflict, no stakes, and no chemistry. It is, ultimately, a simplistic romance dressed up in beautiful visuals. Far removed from the confronting complexity and moral murkiness of *Call Me By Your Name*, *Bones and All* is all style and no substance.

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH GILLOTT▲

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# Forget the cabinet, British Film Institute's latest poll is the most radical reshuffle of 2022

**Isaac Jackson** analyses how an expansion of the voting body saw *Citizen Kane* fall from the top spot after 50 years

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH GILLOTT ▼



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## Film Spotlight


**Alcarràs**

 Carla Simón  
A Mubi Release

Coming to Mubi on February 24th is Carla Simón's sophomore feature. Set in the expansive Catalan landscape, it explores the human effects of capitalism on an intergenerational family of peach farmers.

As each calendar year draws to a close, it's hardly unusual to find various lists across the internet claiming to rank the 'best films of the year'. They're so commonplace you'd be forgiven for feeling a little fed up. But 2022 was always going to be different, with these typical lists destined to take a cultural backseat to a bigger beast.

In December, the British Film Institute's magazine, *Sight and Sound*, published the results of their latest poll which supposedly ranks the 100 "Greatest Films of All Time." Voted for by a body of film critics and academics and taking place only once a decade, this list is always highly anticipated and possess a historic ability to both reinforce and reshape the cinematic "canon".

While headlines surrounding the 2012 list focused mostly on *Citizen Kane* losing its 50-year streak in the number one spot to *Vertigo*, the 2022 poll has witnessed a far more radical reshuffle. Following in the footsteps of other film institutions like the Golden Globes, a huge expansion of the voting body from 846 critics in 2012 to over 1,600 in 2022 has created, in the BFI's own words, a "more diverse group" that acknowledges the "increased influence of film commentators internationally via the internet".

Such diversity unsurprisingly saw a greater vari-

ety of films make the list: a whopping 80% of new entries come from non-white, non-male filmmakers. 2022's poll features 11 films from female directors compared to just two in 2012, including works by Agnès Varda and Julie Dash. Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki*, once the only film listed by a black director, is now joined by six other titles, including Spike Lee's 1989 masterpiece *Do The Right Thing*. The new list is also revolutionary in its willingness to

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A whopping 80% of new entries come from non-white, non-male filmmakers  
”

consider more recent films among the throes of classics, including such twenty-first century hits as Jordan Peele's 2017 *Get Out* and Céline Sciamma's 2019 *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, the latter ranking as high as 30th. Of course, for each new entry another must go, and notable losses include such respected titles

as Robert Altman's *Nashville* and Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*.

A new decade also brings with it a new number one film; leaping up all the way from 36th place comes Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, an almost four-hour-long exercise in slow cinema, examining the everyday domestic life of a widowed mother. Never one to shy away from controversy, writer-director Paul Schrader of *Taxi Driver* fame, though praising *Jeanne Dielman* as a "great film", has criticised its ranking as a "distorted woke reappraisal", implying that artistic merit gave way to political posturing in voters' considerations.

*Sight and Sound* has always been candid about its desire for voters to craft personal lists and, to quote the 1962 poll's introduction, "not to let themselves be influenced by academic orthodoxy into nominating films they might not have seen for 20 or 30 years." The BFI's Jason Wood has praised the most recent list for its "radical... sense of diversity and inclusion", arguing that "canons should be challenged and interrogated", rather than blindly upheld. But we must remember that it's not the BFI themselves who compile the list. The poll is an aggregate of thousands of individual ballots with, contrary to what Schrader might suggest, no shared agenda; "greatest" is defined by each voter in their

own personal way.

Let's face it — the very idea that an objective list of the "best films of all time" is inherently flawed; like all judgements about art, it will only ever be subjective.

That said, if we're still in the business of making lists, it seems only fair that everyone should get a seat at the table, right? The new *Sight and Sound* list may not be an objective arbiter of taste, but it is a positive reflection of a wider sea-change in our culture when it comes to considering diversity. Take, for instance, *The Godfather Part II*, a behemoth of the canon (and, incidentally, a great film). Its removal from the list is hardly going to make much of a dent in its legacy. But for previously undervalued and no less deserving filmmakers, past and present, their inclusion can help to create new legacies.

Schrader might feel like "someone put their thumb on the scale," but it strikes me that, perhaps for the first time in their history, *Sight and Sound*'s voters have just begun to take their thumbs off the scale, embracing, if not a dismantling, a long overdue and glorious refiguring of the canon. It's anyone's guess whether you can call these the "greatest films of all time"... but there's a chance they might just be the greatest films for this time.



**Music****Idris Elba's producer visits Hip Hop Soc**

After connecting over twitter, **Suren Maz Pahlevan** and Manon Dave talk advice for young producers

In November 2020, I was revisiting Che Lingo's debut album, *The Worst Generation*. Out of excitement for the production on the album, I tweeted: "YOooo WHO TF PRODUCED THE WORST GENERATION", knowing I had a chance to network via Twitter with the person who made the tracks that Che raps on.

A few hours later, I checked my phone and saw that Che had liked the tweet. In the comments, the album's executive producer, Manon Dave, had left a raised-hand emoji. Manon had noticed that I was from Cambridge, replying that he was from here too and that he was glad I enjoyed his work. I was excited to see that the producer behind the best album of the year was another guy from Cambridge; it made me realise that networking vertically is possible without spamming someone's DMs.

If you've listened to 'Dark Days' or 'South' you'll know how talented Manon is as a producer.

The Hip Hop Society hosted Manon in November last year. We were privileged to have the opportunity to hear him discuss his multi-sectoral career and to ask him how to make money whilst doing what you love.

Manon began by telling us that, as someone from Cambridge himself, he felt more excited and more nervous about giving a speech at Cambridge University than he did when speaking in front of 2,000 people at the Barbican Centre just three months earlier. Later, Manon mentioned that he spent a year at Oxford studying artificial intelligence (which came as a betrayal to the Canta-

brigan audience!).

Ollie, the president of Music Production Society asked Manon: "If you're starting out as a bedroom producer today, how do you make it in a career with absolutely no network or audience at all?"

Manon responded: "What I'm realising now is that there's really a huge value in the niches. Now, you can be in the niche of the niche, such as the lo-fi homework girl, and the producers who make mood music are making the same amount of money as Dua Lipa, who has a huge team behind her."

Manon also spoke about working with Idris Elba to produce the song 'Biggest', which was featured in the iPhone 14 advert. The audience were amused to hear how the track was originally created for Elba's 'Daily Duppy' but the duo thought it was "kind of

corny", and didn't do anything with it. It wasn't until they were trying unsuccessfully to create a track specifically for the advert, that Manon decided to submit 'Biggest' and ended up landing one of his most iconic placements.

What I've realised, having met Manon and having heard his advice for young producers, songwriters, and musicians, is that a lot of networking and success in the music industry can be spontaneous and unexpected. That's a pretty good explanation of how I was able to link with the best producer in my home city, two years after a music euphoria-induced lockdown tweet.

PHOTO BY SUREN MAZ PAHLEVAN ▶

**The Gallagher Brothers of coffee**

**Georgie Atkinson** sits down with the Bould Brothers to discuss their music taste

Pottering along Regent Street, I bumped into a *Varsity* colleague and mentioned that I was just going to interview the Bould brothers. "Oh I didn't realise they were actually brothers?", my colleague remarked. It is this intriguing status that Alex and Max Bould have established within Cambridge since 2017.

After spending time in the 'rat race' of London, the brothers, although never having actually visited Cambridge previously, seized the opportunity to open their first branch on Round Church Street. The rest is Cambridge coffee brewing history.

As a person who subtly tries but fails to Shazam songs when in one of their shops, I thought the brothers would be an ideal pair to sit down with to ask about their musical taste and inspiration.

Naturally, before speaking to the brothers and waiting for a much-needed black Americano, I Shazamed the song playing and was happily informed that John Splithoff was serenading me with 'Sing to You', rather ironically.

When asked for one of their earliest musical memories, Max noted that their mother dancing

to, 'Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go', by Wham! would have to be a distinct one. Dancing in the kitchen that years later would become the place where the plans for their brand were drawn up. Naturally, with two brothers, you might expect their musical taste to differ ever so slightly. However, the brothers demonstrated an eclectic yet harmonious taste, which perhaps speaks to the fact that they are just 13 months and four days apart in age.

Notably, and perhaps the most surprising aspect of their musical past was their time as undergraduates at the University of Leeds. Max aptly graduated with a degree in Biological Sciences, helpful when trying to wade through coffee pseudo-science.

Alex noted how he had DJed, which eventually escalated into hosting events in the basement of his student house. So much so that a Red Bull representative heard about these parties (dare I even call them a precursor to The Warehouse Project) and offered to sponsor the last party the brothers hosted. Perhaps an early sign of the brothers' entrepreneurial spirit and nature.



▼ PHOTO BY GEORGIE ATKINSON

Early adopters of Tom Misch and The 1975, both Max and Alex demonstrated an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of Misch's discography. Although, Max did remark that, having heard Misch being played in Boots and John Lewis on the same day, it was perhaps time to move their go-to playlist in a different direction.

When asked which track they would pick if, for some reason, they got stuck on a punt and could only take one track with them, some tongue-in-cheek sibling rivalry appeared. Max noted that, if he were stuck on a punt, he would want to draw a crowd with the track, 'Right Back Home to You' by Chromeo, whilst Alex seemed to pick a track more for personal listening, choosing The 1975's 'Oh Caroline'.

Despite Max then noting with starry eyed nostalgia, his passion for Simply Red and Mick Hucknall's voice. Both Max and Alex highlighted that they also seek inspiration from performances such as Kirk Franklin's Tiny Desk concert as well as the smooth and uplifting tones of FKJ.

There's a shared serotonin boost amongst Cambridge students when one of the baristas in Bould Brothers remembers your name. Chatting to the brothers, it's clear that this uplift doesn't just come from the caffeine but is also imbued in their music taste.

**Album Spotlight**

BY NIAMH GREGG



After a five-and-a-half year wait, SZA's massively anticipated

sophomore album, *SOS*, is out. The follow-up to the accolade-laden *CTRL* (2017), it is an undoubtedly more polished and cohesive project. *SOS* explores familiar lyrical themes — raw honesty from SZA about her continuing insecurities, a longing for connection, and a rejection of relationships which don't serve her. SZA couples this with a laudable capacity for theatrical and overblown humour.

The track, 'Kill Bill', in particular, combines comedically extravagant homicidal ideation with a campy-come-glamorous recreation of the titular blockbuster in music video form. The next track, 'Seek & Destroy', pivots starkly to a vulnerable discussion of self-sabotage in the service of self-preservation: "all missiles deployed [...] now that I've ruined everything, I'm so fucking free". Later on, the couplet 'Smoking on my Ex Pack' and 'Ghost in the Machine' (featuring Phoebe Bridgers) showcase the same contrast — a brazen-worded statement of rejection followed by a yearning call for understanding from both her man and the world more widely ("can you hate on me and mask it with laughter? [...] I need humanity / y'all lack humanity").

This vulnerability has not been universally praised. Accusations that SZA hasn't "matured", and that she is "unrelatable" have been levelled on Twitter and Tiktok. Despite this criticism, *SOS* is filled with both lyrical and musical gems. Experiments with different sounds — rock on 'F2F', country on 'Nobody Gets Me', loosely controlled and extravagant vocals on 'SOS' and 'Forgiveness' — and far-flung samples (Björk, Beyoncé, Webster Lewis) have the 68 minute runtime littered with standouts.

Genuinely insightful commentary on sexuality and relationships represent the culmination of at least five years of creativity from SZA. However, the section from 'Conceited' through to 'Open Arms' (featuring Travis Scott) — does suffer from a lack of variation, falling into a slight vocal-heavy pop and RnB rut. Overall, 'SOS', despite the criticisms to which it has been subject, is a commendably honest, open, evocative, and genuinely fun successor to 'CTRL'.

▲ ILLUSTRATION BY FLO BROCKMAN



▲ Listen to SZA's new album!



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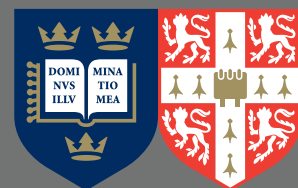
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## Theatre

# 'You leave your own little legacy': The ETG triumphantly returns with Hamlet

**Poppy Gibbs** chats to the European Theatre Group about touring Hamlet post-pandemic

Utterly unique to Cambridge, the European Theatre Group (ETG) has been touring the continent annually with a Shakespeare play since 1957. I sat down with this year's director Ilona Sell, assistant director Flo Winkley, and actors Jacob Benhayoun (Hamlet) and Sarah Mulgrew (Ophelia), the first group to embark on the European tour after the two-year Covid-19 hiatus. "I wanted us to do a good job so that we could set up ETG to continue", comments Ilona, highlighting some memorable praise from an organiser in Konstanz who told her: "Next year we are going to invite the ETG back to the bigger theatre". Clearly their performance made an impression.

The vast but insular Cambridge theatre scene represents a completely different experience to touring schools and universities across Europe, and I'm keen to hear from the production about

their travels. Flo tells me: "it was people of different ages, people of different countries, different languages." Jacob adds: "There's almost a hyper-consciousness within Cambridge. It's [ETG] almost quite freeing, performing in a space where it doesn't feel as if all audience members are out to critique you". Ilona explains: "People are hosting us in their houses, and giving us food. They're going out of their way to look after us because they

“  
The audience questions their sympathies for each character  
”

want to see this show, which is crazy".

Staging *Hamlet* is clearly the right choice in showcasing the ETG's exciting return. "I do think *Hamlet* was a really good choice", comments Ilona, which in her eyes represents a "non-controversial" Shakespeare play, but also one open to exciting new interpretation. In this *Hamlet*, the audience is led deep not only into the Dane's own consciousness, but is guided to question their sympathies for each of the characters on stage. This *Hamlet* explores love, death and comedy in new and exciting ways, aided by the distinct sense of youthfulness that permeates from all aspects of this production. "We really thought about young love", comments Flo, "that's something we can all understand. We wanted to do a young love and the repercussions and the heartbreak of that justice". When the ages of the characters are brought as close to the real ages of the actors as would make sense, a move deliberately taken by the director, Shakespeare's play takes on a kind of new relevance as a student production.

Ilona shares more about her vision as director. "Fresh takes on the characters and the dynamics between them

was quite a big part of it. We wanted to really find each character's sympathy and invite the audience to care about them and present them as real people with these real relationships to each other". The rest of the team agree that it was Ilona's unique vision that contributed to their decision in applying for *Hamlet* this year.



Sarah tells me how this production has similarly transformed the all too often sidelined female characters, discussing her initial apprehension about taking on the role of Ophelia. "What she goes through in the play can get lost in the fact she ends up mad", comments Sarah, "A lot of it is because of grief and heartbreak. As a female character in Shakespeare she has no agency. I wanted to bring that out".

Meanwhile, Jacob's interpretation of *Hamlet* is informed in part by



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|                    |          |
|--------------------|----------|
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|                              |          |
|------------------------------|----------|
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|                    |          |
|--------------------|----------|
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|--------------------|----------|

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his own circumstances. “You end up playing to some extent an extension of yourself [...] thinking about my own experiences helps inform a different kind of characterisation”.

On a lighter note, the four share their favourite memories of the tour, talking fondly of Christmas markets, Belgian drinking songs, even having a celebrity moment after being recognised by locals in a pub and spending a well-deserved weekend in a Swiss chalet. “You leave your own little legacy”, Flo comments, and it’s clear that this student production of *Hamlet* is an important one, not just for those involved, but through the connections forged as a result.

The group tells me of one particularly memorable moment, where an Antwerp teacher tells the team that the reason he had been so keen to put the ETG on for his students was because he had seen the Cambridge group on tour himself back when he was a student. “I feel like that was a full circle moment where you feel like what you’re doing is a part of history”, Flo reflects. This theatre group will no doubt continue to share its passion for Shakespeare and the stage across Europe in its beautifully accessible and distinctive way. This production of *Hamlet* has taken one of Shakespeare’s most well-known plays and breathed into it new life.

*Hamlet is coming to the ADC on the 17th to 21st of January, 7:45pm*

# Contingencies: Ready for Anything is prepping for the stage

**Michael Elizabeth** previews Jonathan Neary's Ready for Anything, his first hour-long standup show at the ADC

**A**re you prepared for a wolf attack? Do you know what historic period you’d visit if given the chance to time travel? You may have considered fall-back plans, but do you have a fall-forward plan? Jonathan Neary, a 2022 Chortle Student Awards semi-finalist and Footlight, is tackling these issues and more in his upcoming stand-up show *Contingencies: Ready for Anything*.

Neary, a history student at Pembroke, first got into stand-up in early 2020. “I loved doing it, and then had to wait about 18 months to do it properly again,” he explains. Before Cambridge, Neary did amateur theatre; upon reaching university, he joined a sketch comedy show and discovered his passion for comedy writing. “In the context of standup, it puts the onus completely on you to make it work, which gives it that added level of satisfaction when it works,” he says. He later became a Footlight and wrote the play *Bunker* last year, which won the

Footlights’ Harry Porter Prize for best comic play. Like *Contingencies*, *Bunker* dealt with the theme of contingency planning for hypothetical scenarios.

Reflecting on the shows’ focus on what-if situations, Neary connects it to his broader comedy writing process. “I based the theme of the show off the theme that I found myself going

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I plan and worry  
way too much in  
real life  
”

back to whenever I wrote stand-up, where I’d write answers and solutions to silly questions that don’t really matter,” Neary shares. “I always found myself coming back to this theme of dealing with absurd what-ifs with sincerity as the style that felt the

most right to me.” Maddy Sanderson, assistant director for *Contingencies*, relates to the theme as well. “I plan and worry way too much in real life—rehearse conversations, talk to myself,” Sanderson says. “It’s nice to know I’m not totally alone in doing that.”

Contingency plans make a fitting theme for a standup comedy show—a comedian has to prepare for anything (and everything) to happen while they’re onstage. A tried-and-true joke could fall flat with a new audience; a heckler could decide to upstage the comedian. Are contingency plans just anxious projection or a wise approach to life? In either case, Neary is weaving stories from his own life into reflections on how to prepare for anything, riffing on everything from social media to those times (plural!) he got mugged in Paris.

Neary has written new material for his first standup hour; performing solo was a long-term goal of his and something he wanted to achieve

before graduating. As a result, he has surrounded himself with a team of comedians who are working to refine his comedy ahead of his performance. “I have a really great team of directors and script editors working with me,” Neary says, “all of whom I really trust and know are very funny people.”

The *Contingencies* team also has ambitions of using the ADC mainstage to its fullest for Neary’s performance. “I’m really excited about the use of tech in the show,” Neary says. “I’m hoping to bring in lots of projection and stuff going on in the background to keep it engaging and play with the format of standup.” Rhys Griffiths, another script editor for the show, shares his enthusiasm for the incorporation of tech into the production. “The music video we’re shooting will rival Beyoncé’s magnum opus,” Griffiths asserts.

With all this talk, what’s Neary preparing his audience for? Find out at the ADC on January 31st.

# Sport: Fifa cannot keep taking fans for granted

Ahead of the 2030 World Cup announcement, **Clark Cossin** argues that football's governing body is ruining the game

**F**ootball needs to hit the reset button. The announcement of a Club World Cup, starting in 2025, means fans need to question FIFA’s decisions. Lovers of the beautiful game, like myself, must make a stand against the football authorities who are taking us for fools.

The newly proposed FIFA Club World Cup will take place every four years like the international World Cup, adding yet another major tournament to an already hectic schedule. The selection of the host nations for the 2030 World Cup this year means that now is the time to question FIFA’s decisions about the future of the sport. There is no doubt that the 48 team, three-country 2026 World Cup is a continuation of FIFA’s record of increasing revenue streams at supporters’ expense. Questions must be asked. Is FIFA catering more to the elite than to those who live and breathe the sport?

Football is broken. Almost every week, examples of this brokenness write headlines and fill back-pages, as shown by the announcement of the Super League in 2021. UEFA advocated for the dissolution of this league, but then came up with a new Champions League format in the works that is almost equivalent to a franchise system.

Club football continues to get more expensive, especially in major com-

petitions like the Premier League. As a lifelong Bayern Munich fan, I have grown attached to German football and the 50+1 rule that embodies it (which allows fans to have control over decision making). Although this rule needs reform to make German football fairer, it personifies everything that the modern game lacks: care for the local community, affordable ticket prices, agency for local communities over national bodies, and great atmospheres that come with enthusiastic fan participation.

Why is it that the German ultras (except those of Red Bull controlled RB Leipzig) are the only ones protesting against ticket prices and UEFA’s reforms in Champions League matches? I have been to Bayern games for less than 90 euros in the best seats. It is almost impossible to find this affordability in any of the major club leagues elsewhere in Europe. My friend, a lifetime Arsenal fan, has not been in many years due to inflated ticket prices. The sense of belonging to a club or a nation brings supporters together and this is impossible when ticket prices for games are extortionate. Games are no longer accessible for the communities who formed clubs at the beginning of the 20th century.

This is even more true on the international stage. In 2018, I tried to go to

the World Cup final in Russia. However, it would have cost at least 10,000 euros for tickets to the game. In comparison, a good seat at Milan’s La Scala to watch *The Nutcracker* costs a tenth of that. This shows how elitist not only the World Cup, but all high-level football has become. FIFA President Gianni Infantino’s ridiculous statement, that the Qatar World Cup was “the best ever” exemplifies FIFA’s intention that football will in the future cater only to the wealthiest, at the expense of the average lover of the beautiful game.

A return to the roots: caring for the football community, less elitist pricing of tickets, and promotion of only a certain number of high-level games within the major competitions that already exist, is the way to revive the sport for the masses. While the football world fragments further, we must hope that one day football federations might put fans first.

To those arguing that money must be made from football, I say that as the most popular sport in the world, this will never be a problem, so stop taking us for granted. We who care about the beautiful game must oppose how football federations throughout the world are choosing capitalist gain over catering to those who keep the sport alive. We need to remind FIFA that they have no authority without supporters.

# Christmas Catch-up

**Jonny Coffey** rounds up the Sport you missed over the break

As many of us succumbed to the allure of Mariah Carey’s glorious vocals and copious quantities of mince pies, Cambridge’s athletes remained locked-in.

**Records tumble as Hounds bound across Cross-Country Course**

The Hares and Hounds claimed a win for the ages at the Cross-Country Varsity in early December. All five teams emerged victorious, marking the most successful Varsity in club history. It was a record-breaking day for individual runners too, as Niamh Bridson Hubbard set a new course record for the Women’s Blues.



**Women carve into victory, Men go off piste in centenary Varsity skiing**

Another Varsity victory was brewing in the slopes of Val Thorens. Cambridge claimed bragging rights in the centenary edition of the Varsity race, defeating Oxford 4-2. The women’s Blues cruised to victory - their 11th in the last 12 contests. The 2s and 3s followed suit, making it a clean sweep over O\*ford. In the men’s, David Edwardes-Ker signed off in style, marking his last Varsity with the Men’s Overall Individual Title. Nonetheless, the men’s Blues fell short, suffering disqualification after failing to register finishes on a testing slalom course. A similar fate befell the 3s, who were also disqualified. The 2s close-fought victory spared Light Blue blushes, and secured the win for Cambridge.

**With age comes defeat in Men's Boat Race trials, and Lionesses suffer rare defeat in the Women's Race**

Ramping up their preparation for the Boat Races on March 26th, CUBC staged trial races on the Thames. The Men’s race pitted an eight of “Youth” against one of “Experience,” while the Women’s paid homage to Lioness icon Beth “Mead” and US star Megan “Rapinoe”. Following the same course that will be followed in March, all sides looked to set the tone. In two hotly contested races, “Youth” and “Rapinoe” prevailed.



# Sport

## Christmas catch-up

Sport you missed over the break

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## Fifa cannot keep taking fans for granted

Comment

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# The Naked Truth: Why are Blues getting their kits off?



“We were going to do it anyway so we may as well do it for charity” – **Hannah Gillott** speaks to the rugby teams stripping for the RAG calendar

It's strange to sit across from people who you've seen naked at the best of times. At least normally it's mutual, but this time I've seen Izzy, Nancy, Charles, and Charlie posed artfully – “neoclassically”, my friend suggested – on the RAG naked calendar. Given the fact that both the boys are called Charles, it's unsurprising that they'll be featuring on the November spread – the Rugby boys.

The Rugby girls' photo is equally artful, set underneath the Kings' bridge. Nancy remembers filing through Queens' in robes early in the morning. The boys weren't so lucky, taking their photo at midday in a busy Magdalene court. Charlie thinks that “the locations they chose made it look more impressive,” but exposing. Charles says they stood naked for 20 minutes as students filed past. When I ask if he was at all embarrassed, he laughs: “They walked through the door and were all just staring and

pointing at my dick...I don't really care if people see my penis. I think it was worse for them than it was for me”. Sadly, the tasteful nature of the calendar means I can neither confirm nor deny that.

Aside from a brief encounter with an old man outside Kings, which Nancy remembers as far more embarrassing for him than them (they all waved), the shoot wasn't at all awkward for the girls. Nancy was relieved that the photographer wasn't a Cambridge student, but a professional photographer smoking his way through the shoot. Between the two of them, they can't work out whether the smoke was being used to blur the photo or the photographer was just a chain-smoker. Looking at the calendar, I can't see any smoke, so it might be the latter. Nancy says that “it might be more weird for teams who don't shower together,” and the boys agree. “It's all stuff we've seen before,” Nancy laughs. “It's a classic stereotype, isn't it, that rugby boys all

love to get naked together,” says Charlie. “We were going to do it anyway so we may as well do it for charity”.

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I don't really care if people see my penis. I think it was worse for them than for me  
”

Since the shoot, there haven't been any bad reactions from family or friends. Charles's mum was “lapping it up,” he says. “She thought it was hilarious”. Nancy's mum “loved it”. It seems like it was a popular Christmas present, and Izzy's and Charlie's grandmas were their lucky recipients. As for Charlie's parents, they “obviously wanted one...But they'll have to buy themselves one”. Nancy and

Charles share a look, before she launches into a retelling of “what happened in maccies at midnight”. In my view, always a bad start. We all agree, though, that someone you barely know shouting “I love your work” at you across the sticky floors of the yellow arches isn't the worst thing that could have happened. She says she “took it for what it was,” and that she had expected that kind of response.

Certainly, the benefits outweigh any backlash. Friends of mine who saw the girls' photo thought it was empowering, and I ask Nancy and Izzy if that's how they felt. Although Izzy wasn't worried before, she tells me that “A few people messaged me before saying they weren't sure about it, because of body confidence issues”. “Rugby's the kind of sport where, like there's lots of different body types”. But with a supportive squad, Izzy got a big group together, and it's amazing to see women's bodies celebrated for their strength.

The boys seemed to have had the opposite problem: “excess,” as Charlie puts it. “We had too many people sign up,” says Charles. “Originally it was going to be the people who were the most ripped”. “It wasn't in a horrible way,” he clarifies. “It was just, like, well if someone's going to do it, it's going to be you, because you're really muscly”. As Charlie puts it: “you've got to put your best foot forward, haven't you”. In the end, the RAG team let them all take part.

Most importantly, the proceeds from the naked calendar go to Cambridge RAG's partner charities. This year, that's Wintercomfort for the Homeless, Refuge, and Dig Deep. With a record profit in the last few years of £7000, the RAG team are “so proud and overjoyed to donate to such great charities”. When I ask for any final comments, Charlie puts it simply: he's “pro-RAG, pro calendar”.