

Notes from Oxford – 19.9.2022

I attended the meeting of Minds Weekend in Oxford, last week, representing the OUSL. I receive a small benefit in terms of a reduced attendance fee, and I attend a lunch for Officers of societies. Others may wish to take on this role in future years.

The following are a few notes from the Vice-Chancellor's presentation 17th September. I will also cover other points later in this note including the subject of IT support and the possible use of the "Wild Apricot" system.

The **Vice-Chancellor, Dame Louise Richardson**, completes her term of office at the end of this year and will then take on the post as head of the Carnegie Corporation in New York (actually a **foundation** dedicated to peace and education). She has been a tremendous Vice-Chancellor and has taken Oxford to the top of the rankings consistently. On the 18th September the Times published their world wide ranking of universities placing Oxford as no 1.

The new VC will be **Professor Irene Tracey CBE FMedSci**. She is Warden of Merton and more information can be found on <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2022-05-09-irene-tracey-nominated-next-oxford-vice-chancellor> . Unlike the current VC, Prof Tracey was born, raised and spent nearly her entire career in Oxford.

Anti Woke

Two notable achievements in countering political correctness:

-The VC supported the decision of Oriel College not to remove **the statue of Cecil Rhodes**. I would add that for all his many and large faults, Rhodes together with Milner established the intellectual foundations of the Commonwealth and the Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) in London. He of course also endowed his eponymous scholarships.

-When the Oxford Students Union tried to ban a pro-Life stand at the Freshers Fair because it contradicted the Students' Union pro-choice policy, she said either they accepted the pro-life stand or the University would not allow the freshers fair to proceed on University premises. When the pro-life stand was vandalised, the University had it repaired "within hours". She said this was independent of her own views on abortion but based on the University's policy with respect to freedom of expression.

In her introduction she talked of how the University impressed on students that they did not have a right not to have their feelings hurt. She drew our attention to the statement on freedom of speech on the Universities website. This can be found on <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/freedom-of-speech> . To quote "The University must therefore foster **freedom of expression within a framework of robust civility**".

Brexit

Post Brexit the proportion of **EU (undergraduate?) admissions are down from 8% to 3%**. She says there has not been a significant flow of EU domiciled academics away from Oxford.

The disappearance of the Erasmus programme is a great loss to students.

The UK government's proposed Turing programme does not make up for it.

Currently for each individual undergraduate to study at an EU or other foreign university the University (did the VC mean the College?) must deal with each university individually that might take

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on the student, to discuss and decide all details including which courses are to be taken, whether they are eligible for credit at Oxford - even living accommodation!. The scheme does not cover tuition fees which might not be waived by foreign universities; nor does it cover overseas students coming to the UK as of course was covered by Erasmus. It does cover a much wider range of countries than does Erasmus.

Research

The highlight, of course, has been the **Astra Zeneca** vaccine provided, at cost, to many poorer countries. The University estimates it has saved 6 million lives. Less publicised are Covid recovery treatments. Since the **RECOVERY** trial, led by University of Oxford scientists, **Dexamethasone** has been widely used as a treatment for Covid. The NHS estimate it has saved a million lives worldwide though the VC only claimed “hundreds of thousands” of lives saved.

She boasted 144 spin-offs from Oxford University research over the past 10 years - not all of it scientific. Over GBP2.5 billion has been raised in the market.

<https://innovation.ox.ac.uk/portfolio/companies-formed/page/8/> .

Admissions

The VC claimed that admissions were made purely on academic ability but when challenged by me admitted that between candidates of equal ability adjustment can be made for background. This clearly understates the position with the University responding to political pressure to admit a higher proportion of state educated candidates. When I challenged her on the dangers of political pressure, she said that this risk was minimised because of the number of people involved in admissions and that tutors were always looking for people they wanted to teach.

Post graduate studies

The VC referred to the fact that while an undergraduate degree was considered sufficient in the past, today a post-graduate degree is more often required. Many PhD degrees in the US come with full funding. This is much less common in the UK. Oxford offers 200 fully funded Clarendon Scholarships each year but more needs to be done.

The Schwarzman Centre

Work on building the Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities is underway. To quote the University’s website, “Oxford’s programmes in English, history, linguistics, philology & phonetics, medieval & modern languages, music, philosophy, and theology & religion will be housed together in a space designed to encourage experiential learning and bold experimentation through cross-disciplinary and collaborative study.”

Perhaps more importantly for us, the VC told us that the Centre will house a 500-seat concert hall which is expected to attract top performers from around the world.

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Wild Apricot system

Demand for systems support from the University Alumni Office was strongly evident. This is needed for handling membership, events, GDPR etc. The only thing the Office was able to offer was that they have approached Oracle. Attendees felt that there would be a major advantage in centralising systems support.

The Apricot system used by Paris and Victoria branches to handle their membership, events etc was discussed. Paris was represented at the lunch and offered to demonstrate the system.

Geneva is also keen to evaluate it. I will await Paris's contact and, if not received, chase them. We will need someone with some systems experience to evaluate the system.

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