

Gazette Supplement



Topic for Discussion: the University's draft Strategic Plan (2013/14-2017/18)

The following is the text of the Discussion in Congregation at 2pm on 19 February on the topic of The University's Draft Strategic Plan (2013/14-2017/18).

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: The business before Congregation is the presentation of a Topic for Discussion. Will you please be seated.

The topic for today's Discussion is the University's draft Strategic Plan.

The University's current Strategic Plan runs from 2008/9 to 2012/13. Council therefore established a steering group in Hilary term 2012, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, charged with the development of the Plan for the period 2013/14-2017/18. The group includes members from Council, the divisions and the colleges, and was supported by separate groups considering in more depth the areas of research, education, personnel and equality, enabling strategies, and wider engagement.

On 5 November 2012, Council approved the draft of the University Strategic Plan contained in the supplement to the *Gazette* of 29 November 2012 as a document for wide consultation across the University during Hilary term 2013. Council also invited submissions on the draft Plan from all bodies within the collegiate University, as well as from individuals, by means of a notice in the same issue of the *Gazette*. Following today's discussion, and the wider consultation, the draft Strategic Plan will be amended in the light of the comments received, and then presented to Council and Congregation for approval by the end of Trinity term 2013.

In accordance with the regulation governing topics for discussion, no vote will be taken at this meeting, but Council will be required to give consideration to the remarks made and

will do so at Council's meeting on 11 March. A transcript of today's meeting will appear as a *Gazette* supplement as soon as possible - hopefully, in the 28 February edition of the *Gazette*. It will also appear on the University website.

The procedure for today's Discussion will be as follows. I shall ask Dr Mapstone, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Chair of the Steering Group responsible for the draft Strategic Plan, to introduce the Discussion and give an overview of the matters for consideration. The topic will then be open to the House. At the end of the Discussion, I shall ask Dr Mapstone to make any final points. Today's meeting will end no later than 4.30pm. Please could speakers come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving their name and college or department. Speakers are asked to follow the usual convention of not speaking for more than five minutes. Positioned to the side of the lectern is an anti-loquitor device, which has green, amber and red lights to help speakers with the timing of their speeches: the lights will change from green to amber once four minutes have elapsed, at which point speakers are asked to begin to wind up their remarks; the amber light will remain on for a further one minute, after which it will be replaced by the dreaded red light, at which point speakers should conclude their remarks. I shall have to ask speakers to bring their remarks to an end if these extend beyond five minutes.

A number of members of Congregation have indicated a wish to speak, and I will call them all. I will then call upon any other members of Congregation who wish to speak. Additional speakers should rise from their seats to indicate their wish to speak; and I would ask that they speak only if they have new points to add which have not already been raised by other speakers.

Speakers are also asked to confine their remarks to the themes relevant to the Topic of Discussion¹.

In accordance with health and safety guidelines, the stenographer who is helping us to transcribe today's proceedings is entitled to a break during the meeting. Therefore, at approximately 3pm, I shall call for a five-minute break. Speakers have previously been asked to email copies of the text of their speeches to the Congregation email address. If any speaker has not already done that, I would be grateful if you could provide a copy of your text to Mr Burns, the officer who is collecting such speeches, as this will be of assistance in preparing the published record of the discussion in the *Gazette*.

I now ask Dr Sally Mapstone to introduce the discussion.

Dr Sally Mapstone, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, St Hilda's

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Proctors, members of Congregation, I'm Sally Mapstone, I'm Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, I'm a member of Council and I'm a fellow of St Hilda's College. As was noted by the Vice-Chancellor, I have also been chair of the group tasked with overseeing the drafting of the Strategic Plan. A number of other members of that group are speaking today, so in introducing the Plan, I am going to talk about four particular things: the key focuses of the draft Plan, involvement of members of the University in its production, feedback, and what's going to be done with that.

¹Under regulation 1.14 of Congregation Regulations 2 of 2002, if the Chairman considers that a speaker's remarks are irrelevant to the question concerned, the Chairman may direct the speaker to confine his or her remarks to that question, and the speaker shall comply with the Chairman's direction.

So, first of all, the key focuses of the draft Plan. The structure of the Plan is to identify strategic challenges for the next five years, to point up two key new priorities for strategic planning, and then, in by far the longest part of the Plan, to outline the four premises and strategies of the Plan in research, education, widening engagement, and personnel and equality, and the Plan closes with an account of enabling strategies. The intention has been that the new Strategic Plan should be high-level and aspirational, an outline structure to which the plans of divisions and services can relate in a way that speaks to the annual planning and budget-setting process within the University. But the Plan should also be seen as one that the colleges can relate to and one would hope that individual members of Congregation can relate to.

The Plan puts at the front the things that will challenge the University, and in particular, the two new proposed strategic priorities of global reach and interdisciplinarity. Although the idea of the University as a global entity and the possibilities of interdisciplinary working featured in the previous plan, they did not receive the attention in planning terms that it is suggested they now require if the University is to remain a leading university with a global identity. Now, having said that, this particular placing does not mean that our core activities, on which so much of the Plan focuses, are pushed down the pecking order. And if you have the Strategic Plan, I would particularly refer you to paragraphs 3 and 25.

So equally important are certain key elements which I'm going to draw out now. Firstly, the academic freedom to pursue research that is curiosity-driven, independent and not overly focused on immediate result. Secondly, high-quality teaching that places an emphasis on the individual and fosters an independence of mind that intersects with our research culture. Thirdly, a commitment to communication that is founded in the notion that universities have a civic responsibility to engage, share and communicate to the public good. Fourthly, a commitment to equality and diversity that encourages everyone to feel that they can truly fulfil their potential here. And fifthly, funding as many of our undergraduates and graduates as is possible and providing them with a student experience that is consistently excellent.

I now come on to involvement of members of the University. In putting the draft Plan together, we've drawn on the existing bodies and structures in which collegiate University business is discussed. Council

has overseen the origination of the Plan, but the groups who forged the content for the main sections of the Plan have had on them divisional representatives, conference representatives, student representatives and representatives from areas of particular expertise, such as OUP. So a sizeable number of members of the University and Congregation have been involved to date. The draft Plan very much reflects that process of discussion. As a draft, it necessarily shows a certain amount of the thinking and the working that went into it. We didn't want to present it to you tied up with a bow on the top.

Now in terms of feedback, 25 sets of feedback have been received to date. The Plan has been discussed across the collegiate University in a wide number of fora: in divisions, in major committees, in the Conference of Colleges, in individual colleges. There have also been articles in the *Oxford Magazine*, comments sent in directly to the Strategic Plan inbox or to me, and a discussion forum has been set up by Professor Susan Cooper. In terms of the live discussions, many of which I've attended, I would like to single out, firstly, the contribution of OUSU, who held last week a well-attended two-hour evening meeting in which our discussion focused particularly on the key new priorities of global reach and interdisciplinarity; secondly, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Department for Continuing Education, who held an academic forum for its staff to focus in particular on the strategic challenges; and thirdly, the Conference of Colleges, whose steering group produced a very constructive draft response which was further refined during discussion in Conference last week. All of these discussions took the form of working with the draft and discussing its potential implementation, and all of them for that reason were very useful. Now, nobody is going to be happy with all of the draft Plan. Indeed, it would have failed in being challenging if they had been. However, having heard or read most of the comment received to date, I can report that discussion of the content of the Plan has been in large part constructive and supportive.

In discussing feedback a bit further now, I'm going to focus on those areas which might be said to need a bit of further work. Firstly, the structure of the Plan. There has been some concern about the balance of the material at the front of the Plan: the relation of the seven strategic challenges and the two priorities to the rest of it, and we're conscious that there is a slightly partridge-in-a-pear-tree element to the structure of the Plan. Some people are concerned that

this suggests that what is at the front is more important than what follows. Now, as I've tried to indicate already, we've put what is particularly new at the front, but our priorities arise out of the strong core values and disciplines that we already have. We will work to make that clearer. A subset of this feedback is that the Plan should be more concise. Professor Cooper has focused on this and I have discussed it with her. I've also read the feedback on her forum and will take it on board in revising the Plan.

In terms of global reach, there's a lot that could be said here, but I would single out particularly that our students in particular responded very positively to ideas around incorporating more international opportunities within an Oxford career. As the Plan indicates, this could be in the form of internships, summer schools, or, where the case can be made and resources found, greater opportunities for study abroad within a student degree. This of course raises many questions and needs work, but the value of making this a priority is already indicated in the feedback that is coming through.

In terms of interdisciplinarity, there is some concern that this suggests that all research activity should be interdisciplinary. Now, the intention is rather to suggest that if we want to do good interdisciplinary work we need to enable and facilitate that, and we will make that clearer.

Feedback on the gender equality emphasis has suggested that this needs to be grounded in a clear, unequivocal commitment to equality and diversity across the University in the Plan, along with more on explicitly supporting not only women's career paths within the University, but also those of our black and ethnic minority staff. We acknowledge that the material on the size and shape of the University in paragraph 48 needs expansion. The brief statement there reflects the state of play when the draft was being finished. What we can say now is that we're undertaking, with the divisions and Conference, a review of the size and shape of the student body that will inform decision taking in the planning period, and that a broader consideration of size and shape must look at staff as well as students, and acknowledge and work with the dramatic changes to the demography in the past decade in terms of the increase in employment of those in dominant league research contracts.

So what happens next? Well, the intention is to work hard with this feedback over the Easter vacation and to produce a revised

version of the Plan that will go to Council and Congregation in the mid-point of Trinity term. For those who wish to go on commenting on the draft Plan, you have until the end of this term to do so. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. The discussion is now open to the House and I ask Professor Alex Halliday to speak first.

Professor Alex N Halliday, Wadham, Head of Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences

Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues, members of Congregation, I am Alex Halliday. I am at Wadham College, and I am a member of the Department of Earth Sciences and I'm also head of the MPLS Division: Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division. I want to talk to you today about the need for interdisciplinarity, in particular, which is a key focus of the Strategic Plan.

Oxford has built a formidable reputation for itself over many centuries in terms of its research and teaching in fundamental academic disciplines like English, mathematics, history, for example, and these are widely seen as tremendously strong aspects of what we do. Yet many aspects of the modern world actually require that we think across these disciplines in different ways. We need to look at this in four main ways, four main facets, each of which are mentioned in the Strategic Plan.

The first is that many of the areas of study which are really ripe for discovery and exciting new breakthroughs actually sit at the interfaces between traditionally distinct disciplines. I grew up as a geologist, went to university as a geologist, I switched to a physics department to do my PhD and part of it was because physics and geology were at this incredibly exciting time where plate tectonics was being discovered, etc. It was that nexus and connection which generated huge amounts of new discovery about the earth. The same is true, for example, if you look at the way engineering is impacting biomedicine: putting people together to actually get training in both those subjects and working across those disciplines is having enormous impact on patient care. And so we actually need to think about ways in which we can exploit our disciplinary strengths, which are outstanding, and as Dr Mapstone said, incredibly strong at Oxford in particular and something we want to maintain, to build on those things and actually make sure of exploiting the interfaces between these disciplines.

The second major issue is that many modern issues we're concerned with are

actually by nature cross-disciplinary, so we need to know about climate change, for example. And climate change involves mathematics, advanced mathematics, new statistics, new kinds of computer modelling, but it also involves major ethical issues that are dealt with in the humanities, issues of governance, issues of politics, economics, engineering, issues that take place in the earth sciences, the geosciences and geography as well. And here we've got all these terrific people at Oxford who actually are brilliant experts in these areas, yet we don't actually have the platform for really allowing them to work together in a cross-disciplinary way to deal with these issues. So we need to think about ways in which we can enhance the communication and discussion across these areas in a way that will actually facilitate us to be very strong. A good example is the area of energy research. It wasn't until recently when we hired someone to actually take a look at how big we were in energy research that we discovered we had 130 faculty across the University in Social Sciences and MPLS working on energy - and nobody on the outside knows, and we didn't know on the inside either.

Third, many of the facilities that we need for modern research can be shared, and this is a great opportunity for interdisciplinary research as well. So in the old days we used to hang around by a computer feeding tape into a machine that we shared or we met and talked across a fax machine or whatever it was. Nowadays, of course, a lot of these things are actually in your office and increasingly people are becoming isolated from each other, but there are opportunities for getting people to work together by actually focusing on hiring a piece of equipment and setting up facilities that are shared across a university or between universities, and actually get people to mix and talk about their ideas and the opportunities that they've got for new discoveries and new techniques.

The fourth thing that's really important is the education side. There are lots of people here with fantastic educations that are being generated through tutorial teaching in colleges and through classrooms, fieldwork experience and laboratories but they're being done in very much siloed subjects like physics, engineering, etc. Increasingly, we need engineers who actually also understand economics and we need people who are physicists who also understand philosophy. That can be done in this University very effectively and at some level it already is, with joint degrees, etc, but I think we need to think about muddling

people up more in the way we actually arrange our classrooms in particular forums.

So, just in summary, many of these problems reflect the way Oxford has developed. We're a very balkanised institution with finances that are devolved all the way down to the individual department and we need to find ways of actually crossing those divides in the way we think about both our finances and also our buildings and the way we're putting people together. Thank you very much.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Professor Alastair Buchan.

Professor Alastair Buchan, Corpus Christi, Head of Medical Sciences

Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of the Congregation, I am Alastair Buchan, I'm from Corpus Christi and I am Head of the Medical Sciences Division. And I really would like just to make two major points, but I think they're in keeping with how we make best use of this opportunity to both develop and review and agree a Strategic Plan.

A couple of things came up at Council last week. One was this conversation this afternoon, and the other was the review of the Medical Sciences Division, which took place last year. Really very important for us, it's really, if you like, awakened in us a need to re-evaluate our interaction with the University. It's spring, Mr Vice-Chancellor, and it's a beautiful day and it kind of awakens in us the need to reaffirm our vows to the University. What came out of the divisional review in my estimate is that there are really two things that are really important and they both actually speak to academic freedom and the rights and responsibility of the University.

The first really is that I work in the NHS and we're going through all kinds of change, all kinds of criticism, all kinds of things which are really very hard for us to look after and to really sort out in a teaching environment where we try to really get the next generation to where they need to be. The University provides us with a constancy that is just not part of our daily life in a hospital environment. So that University constancy in many ways is what is coming out of the rights and responsibility of a university, and we absolutely need that.

Secondly, we need to be able to protect the primacy of the individual scholar, and that is of course the academic freedom, which is why you are all here. So there's a tension between actually having a constancy and having a changing environment that allows people to perform to their best abilities.

We looked at what was happening with Medical Sciences and there was a real risk that we might drift off and become, as they have in the States, as they have in Holland, an academic medical centre, and actually that's therefore awakened in us this spring a need to really reaffirm those vows. What is mentioned in the Strategic Plan are really seven things that really matter to us. That is the generation of new knowledge, it is the interdisciplinarity, the contribution of that knowledge to the wider society - and nothing could be more important than health. The joint activities with the other universities are critical and, of course, the support and training that we need to give, and actually right through not just the University but the healthcare system, ensuring that there is a fairer gender balance.

So I really am supportive of the detail in this Strategic Plan, and it really is important whether it's open access or building on the access for students, it is ultimately to maintain the quality so that we really are that global-reaching University. What I do absolutely depends on interdisciplinarity although the insights will be very focused and will come from those scholars. So we, in interpreting the review, need to work very closely with the colleges. That is the unique selling point of having a medical school that is in close connection to the University's colleges. We need to work upwards to the University, and to the other universities. We need to bring our departments and institutes into the kind of space they need to be to be able to achieve the external environments on offer, which is, of course, often now needing to be leveraged.

So we need to work towards a common purpose. The Strategic Plan helps us achieve that common purpose and actually one of the key points in the review was getting the divisions, all four of them, to work together to create the common purpose, which of course ultimately is that of the University.

So, in closing, it is about a real desire on the part of the Medical Sciences Division to ensure that we're in the centre of this University. While Sally mentioned a partridge in a pear tree, I'll finish by saying that, in this week of St Valentine, we would like to reconfirm our affection for this University.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Shearer West.

Professor Shearer West, Magdalen, Head of Humanities

Hello, I'm Shearer West. I'm Head of the Humanities Division and a Fellow of Magdalen College. Today I am wearing two

hats, and speaking both in my role as Head of Humanities and in a personal capacity as a member of Congregation. Having been involved with the development of strategic plans in other places, I felt it would be useful for the purposes of this discussion to reflect on the processes that we have undergone here at Oxford in recent months. For this purpose, I would like to consider what I think a strategy is and what it is not, and provide some insights from a Humanities perspective.

First, I'd say that a strategy is not a series of platitudes printed on a laminated card and languishing in the corner of the marketing department. A strategic plan will certainly never win a prize for inspiring prose, because it is an operational document. Oxford academics rightly pride themselves on elegant and incisive writing, and no doubt the current Plan could benefit from a dose of that. But a strategic plan needs to be direct and pragmatic, rather than rhetorically embellished.

Second, a strategy is not a top-down conspiracy. The best strategies encompass the values and aspirations of the whole university. Providing a straw person as fodder for discussion is essential, and the purpose of the Strategic Planning Groups were exactly that. The wide consultation process around the current Strategic Plan has rightly unleashed forceful views and debate throughout the collegiate University - which is exactly what a good strategic planning process ought to do.

Finally, a strategy is not a detailed plan for how things will be achieved. The ways in which identified priorities are acted upon is the business of the University's departments, faculties, colleges, Council and Congregation, and will rightly be the subject of much attention and discussion over the next few years.

So these are the things that I personally believe a strategy is not. But I'd like to turn now to what I think a strategy is.

First, a strategy is concerned with what needs to change, rather than what should remain the same. In Oxford, as other speakers have already said, we collectively believe in the exceptional quality of our research, in the unique excellence of our tutorial system, in academic freedom, and in our special curatorial role. However, the Strategic Plan itself must devote most attention to those areas where we have the capacity to improve, such as interdisciplinarity, global reach and wider engagement.

Second, a strategy must be a living document - regularly revisited and subject to adjustment as times change. A strategy provides a direction of travel - not a detailed map of how to get to the destination. Therefore detours, stop offs and changes of direction are not only feasible but expected.

Finally, a strategy must engage with the external environment. In this respect, it is worth thinking of strategy in terms of both its military and chess game connotations. We are living in unstable times for higher education, but there are also many opportunities for a university as strong as ours if we plan ahead. However, instead of feeling embattled (as in war), I believe we are nimble enough to anticipate future directions and plan our own moves accordingly (as in chess). We require a plan of action that shows awareness of our external environment but puts us on the front foot and in a leadership position. What we cannot do is assume that it is enough to rely on our historic strengths alone.

So for Humanities, this Strategic Plan is signalling a direction towards which we are already embarking, thanks to the inventiveness and imagination of our fellows, professors, early-career researchers, students and administrative staff. A number of fresh interdisciplinary initiatives have already been developed, such as within the new Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities, and the rejuvenated plans for a Humanities hub on the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter.

For me, the Strategic Plan represents a way forward for Oxford University that is already being explored in Humanities but has yet to be fully embedded. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Mr Tim Gardam.

Mr Tim Gardam, St Anne's, Chair of Conference of Colleges

Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, I'm Tim Gardam, I'm from St Anne's College and Chair, currently, of Conference of Colleges. Now, the draft Strategic Plan may not read exactly as the most eloquent of documents. It is, after all, not the work of one pen, and Congregation would rightly be suspicious of it if it were. It is being refined through different perspectives from across the University. As the Chair of Conference, I have represented one of those perspectives, and what I will say today is intended to reflect the broadly held views that have come into focus as the colleges have discussed these issues collectively, and they in large part reflect many of the points made by previous speakers.

A strategic plan of course assumes a strategic intent, and that in Oxford will inevitably be complicated to articulate. Even so, there is a clear common purpose here – the University, comprising its divisions, its faculties and its colleges, must together, in the face of rapid change and increasing challenge, adapt the strengths of our culture to retain our position as one of the leading centres of scholarship, research and teaching in the world. Strategic failure would be to slip from being in the first rank of world-class universities to being subsumed into the mass of academic institutions that, for all their public value and past renown, can no longer be ranked as such.

This is why international and interdisciplinary perspectives are central to this document. Oxford is moving inexorably towards becoming a predominantly privately funded global university, secured in its identity by its historical sense of itself. The University remains undercapitalised in comparison to its international rivals. But it can deploy its distinctiveness as its competitive advantage. In this, our collegiate structure should be a critical factor.

The colleges, complementary to the University's divisions and departments, but inextricably linked to them, are, at their best, adaptable and agile interdisciplinary and international communities, bonding together academics and students from different fields, socially and intellectually. The Strategic Plan emphasises the quality of the experience we must offer to all our students. It includes an ugly phrase – 'individualised educational experience' – but it is one that nonetheless signifies an important principle. We must make good the claim that every Oxford student is known personally and monitored individually throughout their time here. We can say this for our research students through their relationship with their supervisors; we can say this about our undergraduates so long as we do not dilute the tutorial system. But we cannot as yet claim this in some part for our master's students. The master's students' academic relationships are very different to those of undergraduates but the strategy should make it a priority to enhance their experience.

Personal academic responsibility for each student should inform the one missing piece of this draft strategy – the future size and shape of the University.

The Conference of Colleges has a pretty clear view on this; colleges have embraced the changing University as graduate numbers

have nearly doubled; the smallest college today is larger than the median of ten years ago. But Conference believes that no cogent academic argument has yet been made as to why Oxford, already bigger than Harvard, Yale, Cambridge, Imperial, Chicago and MIT, and only slightly smaller than UCL, should simply continue to grow its student numbers.

Our discussions have recognised the merit in expanding doctoral student numbers in the sciences; the lack of fully funded graduate opportunities, especially in the humanities, is one of the major crises facing our research culture; and we have recognised the world-class reputation of our social sciences, where the majority of students are graduates.

However, at a time when the issues surrounding British undergraduate access are so intense and with international undergraduate applications increasing every year, any reduction in undergraduate numbers is not only undesirable, it is unrealistic.

The Strategic Plan should clearly signal that Oxford will resolve this question of balance and shape, without it becoming in any way a pursuit of sectional interests.

The other major focus of this Plan is interdisciplinary research. Colleges are by their nature inherently interdisciplinary. These characteristics should be developed with greater intent.

Colleges, apart from their contribution to salaries and sabbatical leave, spend over £13 million a year supporting research. A Conference survey has identified over 800 research posts, 239 of these stipendiary fellowships fully funded by colleges. This is an extraordinary resource, largely for early-career academics, many in the humanities, who are offered entry into a supportive interdisciplinary research culture. There are 47 college-based Research Centres, with 9 more in the process of being established, 28 receiving funds from outside the University. These opportunities need better to be coordinated with the rest of the University, conceived of as genuine partnerships with the divisions.

Finally, the Plan acknowledges that private philanthropy will become even more important in the future. Without a clear sense of our priorities, and a preparedness to hold to these in the face of even the most generous benefactors, donor-led fundraising could inadvertently undermine the clarity of our academic objects.

So, this document might of course be accepted by Congregation, put in a drawer

and pulled out again when it is time to write the next one. On the other hand, it can allow us to shape our inherent strengths, and, where we recognise we have strategic weaknesses, to look to our collegiate culture as one strategic asset in meeting that challenge.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Professor Ian Walmsley.

Professor Ian Walmsley, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Academic Services and University Collections), St Hugh's, Department of Physics

I'm Ian Walmsley, Professor of Physics, Fellow of St Hugh's and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, Academic Services and University Collections. I will talk about Strategic Planning in the context of research. Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Henry Newman and Clark Kerr framed the role of intellectual activities in universities for the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. There is no definitive model as yet for an internationally leading 21st-century university. Perhaps this is because no model as powerfully attuned to their times as on public state education, the idea of a university and the uses of a university could frame, although perhaps we may find ourselves eventually commensurate with Kerr's more famous remark on what the major provisions of a higher education institution should be.

Perhaps our opportunity then in the Strategic Plan is to answer this question for ourselves. It should enable us to articulate what is unique and distinctive about the way we do things. We, of course, conceive of the University as an elite institution in the best sense of that objective, that is as a meritocracy, for students as much for academics, and for those who we can identify who can contribute and benefit the most from the conjunction of individual teaching and world-leading research that we regard as the hallmarks of excellence.

Research is indeed a major component of our enterprise, and, intertwined with our teaching and wider engagement activity, it is the basis of our international reputation. Therefore it is appropriate for us to reflect and articulate how we view our research activity in those elements of the Strategic Plan. So what are the key issues that we might expect should be stated in a University-level Plan? I believe these relate to how we conceive of excellence in research, how we create and support it, and how we stimulate it across the widest possible range of enquiry.

What are the core elements of the activity and how should they underpin the elements

of the Plan? I believe these are three. First, the creative autonomy of individuals, about which you've heard much today. Research is about generating ideas and it is individuals who do this, either alone or in concert with others. It is imperative therefore that we engage persons who are able to think creatively and undertake the highest-quality research that identifies the questions, the answers to which may transform our understanding, our society or our economy. Ideas can best be validated and tested within a particular kind of environment, perhaps an ideas ecosystem, that enables transformational concepts to arise and to be evaluated appropriately. In this sense, revolution derives from evolution. The central elements of such a system are two: a critical mass of activity constituted of both breadth and depth, and a competitive tensioning which allows our ideas to be compared across the globe. This comparison is an accurate, if occasionally imprecise, means to determine what is surpassing merit in research.

The strategies therefore that underpin these aims are rather easily understood. Resources providing the research infrastructure and facilities to enable people to undertake this research; development to support and nurture academics throughout their careers, facilitating them not only to follow but to set the international research agenda; collaboration to increase the coordination and coherence of research activity, and to reduce the barriers to collaborative working.

Nonetheless, how we approach these will be tempered by major external challenges arising from the rapidly changing environment. Critical elements of this are the scale and mode of delivery of external funding, more stringent reporting and compliance environments, as well as the international competition that arises from institutions around the world. Nonetheless, to meet these, we have a fortunate starting position: first, a flexible and reconfigurable network of pre-eminent researchers across a broad and diverse range of activities, a remarkable asset and one that is easy to underestimate; and second, a vibrant culture for competing for external resources and a history of outstanding success in attracting them. We should not, of course, confuse inputs to research with research itself, but they are nonetheless a critical enabling factor.

So, therefore, how do we conceive finally our strategy for research in order to sustain ourselves as a world-leading forum for the generation, reception, evaluation, exploitation and dissemination of ideas, certainly one in which we value the core

principles of outstanding scholarship, academic freedom and education of the individual that lead to transformative impact based on our research and teaching? We shall continue to support the creative autonomy of the best researchers, tensioned by competition for resources. This top-down allocation enabled by a bottom-up strategy is a key part of our recipe for excellence in research. With this, I believe we will have a distinctive vision for how a great university can operate in a global context, addressing fundamental questions of deep significance that are themselves always global questions.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Dr Fernanda Pirie.

Dr Fernanda Pirie, St Cross, Director of the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies

Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, I'm Fernanda Pirie, a University Lecturer in Socio-Legal Studies, a member of St Cross College. I want to offer some words of caution about interdisciplinarity, to suggest that we need more clarity about what it means, who should be doing it, and how, but also to suggest that there are dangers in its unthinking promotion.

As the Director of the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, a multi-disciplinary research centre, I've had many opportunities to observe people doing, attempting and aspiring to do such research. I am not suggesting that it is a bad thing, far from it. The Plan and Professor Halliday are quite right to talk of major research questions and major discoveries. But in the Plan it's promoted as if it were an unqualified ideal, for all of us and our students. Indeed, paragraph 8 talks of 'essentially artificial lines drawn between traditionally different disciplines'.

But what is wrong with disciplines and their boundaries? Academic activity needs standards, and, like the arts, must create its own - to govern what work is funded and published, how we teach and examine. And this requires consensus, hence disciplines. At the same time, academic issues need to be addressed from different angles, questions posed in different ways, different methodologies developed. We need distinct disciplines and academic heterogeneity. Of course disciplinary boundaries should not be rigid or impermeable. But a world without them, and without a good deal of disciplinary research, is surely inconceivable.

Then again, are there really so many barriers to interdisciplinary work, that it needs to be strengthened, developed and supported as a priority? In the social sciences it is the easiest thing in world to talk to scholars from other departments, divisions and

universities, and to set up joint seminars and projects. The problem is rather to get funding or support for work that isn't.

But, more importantly, should we all be aspiring to do it? The fact is that it is very hard to produce good work that speaks to different audiences, engages with different sets of themes, uses a variety of methods, and meets more than one set of standards. Even dialogue in collaborative projects can be hard. I am part of a project involving anthropologists and historians. These two are actually very close in methods and approaches, but even here we come up against subtly different assumptions and ideas. Ultimately this project (I think) is a success, and has promoted debates and publications that are innovative and exciting. But it's not easy, or straightforward, even amongst established scholars who are flexible thinkers.

So encouraging too much of this work, especially amongst junior scholars, is not likely to produce either good research or successful academics. If collaboration is difficult, how much more so is interdisciplinary work attempted by a single scholar? Yet every year, we get applications from prospective students who promise projects that will borrow methods and theories from law and political science and sociology and anthropology and media studies... And rarely are these good, or doable projects. Their research questions often seem reduced to some lowest common denominator. And even if they could be completed, where would this research be published, how would it be placed in the REF, and where would the scholar look for a job? It's our experience that good scholars need a firm disciplinary starting point before being encouraged to branch out.

For students on taught courses the Plan promises 'the sequenced promotion of interdisciplinary learning' (whatever that means). But master's students on mixed courses often talk of confusion. 'The economics tutor says one thing, and then the anthropologists come along and contradict it! Well, of course they do; and good students can cope. But we must not underestimate the difficulties this poses, nor let the students think that these courses are the best preparation for research careers.

I would like the authors of the Plan to reconsider the presentation of Priority 2, to be much more cautious about what they promote, and more specific about who should be doing it. We can, and should, do better than the research councils, and their unreflected and mind-numbingly insistent promotion of interdisciplinarity.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Dr Stephen Goss.

Dr Stephen Goss, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel and Equality), Wadham

I'm a Fellow in Medicine at Wadham College and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Personnel and Equality. Vice-Chancellor, Proctors, members of Congregation, I should like to start by thanking those who've responded to the consultation, not least those who have engaged with the equality agenda and asked us to be more explicit in our commitment to all aspects of diversity amongst both staff and students.

What needs to be foremost in our minds as we lay plans for the future is bound to change from time to time, and the new draft Plan aims to take a fresh look and give emphasis to new challenges and priorities.

In the last five-year Plan, issues relating to Personnel and Equality were grouped as 'enabling strategy', but, in the new draft, they are given more prominence by inclusion within 'core strategy'. This is in no way intended to suggest that routine work on personnel issues ought to be central to our mission in the same way as teaching and research and the engagement with society that flows from them. Rather, the intention is that, for this coming period, the strategic consideration of our teaching, research, and wider engagement needs to go hand in hand with the strategic consideration of Personnel and Equality.

It is now timely that Personnel and Equality should be seen as much more than an administrative domain addressing legislation imposed on us from the outside. To give an illustration that will be close to the interests of Congregation, major issues have arisen from *within* the University, from the academic body itself, about our particular arrangements for academic employment. We have expressed our aspirations and set out our needs, a broad range of views has been collected by the Task Force, and two sets of recommendations have emerged. Implementing these recommendations acceptably will be no simple matter, not least because people's aspirations for their research, for their teaching, and for the furtherance of their careers are often, at least at first sight, pulling in opposing directions.

If we are to make progress, we need now to resolve that these matters will be strategic priorities for the immediate future. Looking for improvements to the way we work, finding better ways, for instance, to accommodate flexibility in how academics divide their effort between different duties

at different stages of their careers, are matters that are central to sustaining the tutorial system, and they are central to the future of our research. Equally, getting this right is crucial to our ability to attract and retain the most able staff. We must never forget that there are a good many other universities with fine facilities and attractive conditions of employment with which we must compete. Of course, we are fortunate in the high quality of our students, and we can also say that there aren't that many universities whose buildings are as beautiful as this. Our record to date is one of considerable distinction, but there can be no doubt that careful attention is needed - we need, in Professor West's terminology, to be nimble - if we are to maintain that position as the global competition gets increasingly keen.

Turning to equality and diversity, we find further issues that have come to the fore through internal considerations. Though many of you will be aware that the Athena SWAN initiative to promote women in science has recently become effectively a regulatory issue on which our access to major research funding in medicine is now contingent, it may not be well known that MPLS has been working for some time to understand and address gender imbalance in the sciences: six MPLS departments are accredited for their work in this area, and all but two will have applied for accreditation by the start of next term. Medical Sciences is making a massive effort, and there are departments and faculties in the other two divisions which are now beginning to ask how they can gain from similar work. Wherever diversity is less than expected, it is likely that we have overlooked talent and our shared endeavour will suffer. This applies not only to gender but to all aspects of diversity. The remedies stretch beyond fairness in recruitment, career development, and promotion: typically, it is necessary to change the working culture, to give everyone a fair opportunity to participate in the life of a department and to have a fair say in decision-making. Importantly, the finding is that the benefit that follows is widespread and not confined just to the minorities at the centre of consideration.

Our latest equality report shows areas for improvement both with respect to staff and students, and we can be certain that it will take sustained effort to make progress. If we are serious in our intentions, then the promotion of equality needs to be accorded high priority in our new Strategic Plan.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Miss Suzanne Holsomback.

Miss Suzanne Holsomback, Green Templeton, Vice-President (Women) of the Oxford University Student Union

My name is Suzanne Holsomback. I'm the Vice-President (Women) for the Oxford University Student Union, and I'm a member of Green Templeton College. Mr Vice Chancellor, Proctors and Assessor, members of Congregation. Thank you for this opportunity this afternoon to articulate the student perspective. I come with over 21,000 voices to highlight two main topics: interdisciplinary education and equality.

Priority 2 stresses networking, communication and interdisciplinarity.

How are we to do this? The Strategic Plan uses words such as collaboration, cross-fertilisation, richness, multiple disciplines, partner, global significance. These are powerful words. They mean something. They ask us to act.

But how are we to do this? The Strategic Plan says we find this at the interface of traditional subject matters.

But again, how are we to do this? New collaborations? Sharing resources? Who is going to take the first step? Who will leave their labs and libraries and find the richness of the chaos of the interface?

Journeying to the interface will look different. It is different. But it's not bad. We will ask new questions, we will ask different questions. Research will change. Research will look different. Funding bodies will raise eyebrows. We will be stretched to our limit.

Are we ready to be different? Are we ready to lead the way to unexplored areas of academia?

I think yes. I think you, Congregation, can find the creativity in the mix. I know students can find the creativity in the mix.

But how are we to do this? I see three main ways to strive for intersectionality.

Firstly, we must constantly seek the best education without growing complacent, without thinking that the interface is too difficult to manoeuvre. The Strategic Plan is bold, let's not be afraid of different, of new actions, of new perspectives, of new challenges.

Secondly, we must flee from the rhetoric that educational excellence and research excellence are alongside each other and not one and the same. You cannot have one without the other, you have to have both to be extraordinary. We are an extraordinary

University and our education creates the researchers that educate the next generation.

And finally, diversity. We must strive for diversity in race, gender, sexual orientation and belief. This draws us to the centre of the interface and forces us to look at our work, at our research, from a different perspective. A researcher from Sri Lanka looks at anthropology or English literature or the philosophy of physics differently. A transgendered woman will see social intervention differently than a black man. It is a different perspective. It's not a bad perspective.

This diversity must be essential to our Strategic Plan. Racial diversity must be included in how we move forward. Look around the room. Mmm-hmm. We will not create rich interconnections of which we dream if we do not have a strategy to diversify our staff and student bodies.

Speaking about diversity brings me to my second topic – equality. In paragraph 3 the Strategic Plan says that the core strategy 'will maintain that constancy of excellence'. We do not have a consistency of excellence in equality in this university.

But I firmly believe we can.

We can do this by addressing the gender gaps in senior levels, in professorships, in reading lists, in the paintings that hang in our dining rooms. Rotate them around – colleges have a lot. Put a black woman on the wall. When women and ethnic minorities see someone who looks like them in leadership positions, they will also see themselves as leaders and we as a university need this.

Gender gaps for undergraduates at finals is statistically small, but it is still around despite being the complete opposite of every other UK university except Cambridge. We need to change the questions we ask and we need to listen to the Athena SWAN data from the MPLS Division highlighting the confidence levels of students in their first year. We need to incorporate that into our Strategic Plan.

We can also strive for equality by not just merely 'engaging' with Athena SWAN initiatives in departments, but integrating what student focus groups and Athena SWAN researchers recommend. This will be costly, but Athena SWAN is an imperative to our research funding. It is imperative to this University. We can no longer just talk about this in theoretical terms. We must act now. Our funding depends on it. This is not only for the sciences. It's for all of us.

Finally, equality for marginalised student groups is also an imperative. We must improve the infrastructure of the University for students with caring responsibilities, such as children. Many colleges do not offer housing for students that have partners or families. The colleges and the University must work together so that people know that they can move here and thrive with their families. Childcare, transportation and parking all come under this as well. We want the best and the brightest here, so we need to open our University, so we don't lose those who we want.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Congregation, thank you for listening to the voice of the students. And quickly, before I leave, the Vice-Chancellor mentioned this weekend to a colleague and I that he didn't receive a Valentine from the student union, so I wanted to make sure you got one. Happy Valentine's Day.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Dr Jeff Tseng. After Dr Tseng has spoken, we will take a five-minute break, at which point I will read my Valentine.

**Dr Jeff Tseng, St Edmund Hall,
Department of Physics**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, I'm Jeff Tseng, Department of Physics and St Edmund Hall. I wonder if I'm actually the only ethnic minority in this room, but on the other hand I'm actually not going to talk about that. I'd actually like to make two other points: first, to re-emphasise to my colleagues the importance of this Discussion and consultation over the Strategic Plan, and, second, to commend consideration of Professor Cooper's Alternative Draft, speaking particularly on an important addition it makes regarding administration.

Now, concerning the first point, we are told that we function in an increasingly complex environment. Many of us here have experience on committees in our colleges and in the University, and we can feel the truth of the statement. For instance, on the Audit and Scrutiny Committee, we usually receive nearly 200 pages of printed matter before a meeting, with a number of additional online reports, and I understand that we may be getting off lightly.

One result is that committees get lost in details, and the risk is that without an interpretive framework, it is all too easy for committees to retreat into inaction, or lash out wildly, changing their minds from one meeting to the next. Worse still, decision-making without an interpretive framework concentrates enormous power into the hands of those who feed information to

the committee – often, unavoidably, a local interpretation of a situation. So a committee without an overall framework to balance this is really at the mercy of its officers.

It can therefore be seen as a positive step that the recently revised Regulations for the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee refer specifically and repeatedly to the Strategic Plan. Now, I don't know if this is just a first step in embedding the Plan across the University. In any case, our Discussion today is no mere exercise in navel-gazing. We should expect that whatever goal is mentioned in the Plan will obtain resources, possibly at the expense of others. We should also expect that if there is any subtlety or nuance to the Plan, it will be lost; committees simply have no time for them. It is therefore all the more essential that the Plan be clear, concise, plain-spoken, and readable, with a minimum of bells and whistles, and, well, migraine-inducing management-speak.

At the same time, if the Strategic Plan guides committees, and committees guide the University, then Congregation should have an ongoing hand in guiding the Strategic Plan. Paragraph 4 of the draft mentions annual reviews, though it is unclear who does them. Perhaps Congregation should not have this one Discussion every five years over the entire strategy, but actually yearly discussions, and even votes, over revising its different parts.

Now, my second point concerns the place of the University's administration in the Plan. There has been a lot of discussion in past years over the increasing size of administration. On the one hand, it is undeniable that administration is essential to the University, and, indeed, I have run into a number of administrators for whom the University is not just any employer, but who give exceptional service because they really value its purpose just as much as any academic.

On the other hand, it is easy to see how the administrative apparatus naturally adds to itself. It is always tempting to address a new issue by appointing someone to take charge of it. Viewed only in terms of its functions, it is an aggregation of many good intentions. Its resources, however, are highly correlated with those of the rest of the University.

So it is odd that the draft Strategic Plan, which is intended to guide resource allocation, makes no mention of the size and shape of as significant an element, as well as consumer of resource, as the administration itself. Instead, it remains largely invisible, a potent yet unseen force which can help, hinder, and even starve our activities.

For this reason, I would like to commend the particular section of the Alternative Draft which reads: 'Oxford will ensure that its University Administration and Services efficiently and effectively supports its academic activities by implementing a rolling programme of reviewing the constituent parts of UAS to determine which activities are essential and which could be scaled down, made more efficient, or reduce the burden they place on academics; and reporting the results of each review to Council and Congregation.'

I have heard that reviews do take place, though I am aware of neither their scope nor their results. One colleague has proposed, for future such reviews, a question inspired by our Statute I.3: 'How have you saved the time or resource of those directly involved in the principal objects of the University - the advancement of learning by teaching and research and its dissemination by every means?' (By the way, Statute I.3, I think, is better than any mission statement.) I suspect many will be able to start their response by saying, 'Yes, I have' in response. Another colleague suggested using TRAC data to measure the University's progress in making time for its principal objects. TRAC data has some difficulties, but I have to admit there is something appealing about using it to measure administrative effectiveness.

Now, I don't know whether such reviews would find that our administration is too large, too small, or indeed just right, but it does seem essential that the administration itself become a visible part of the University's strategy for there to be any balance whatsoever. Otherwise we may find that whatever benefit we derive from a Strategic Plan is buried under that mountain of good intentions.

For this reason and others, I commend the Alternative Draft Strategic Plan to my colleagues in this important and ongoing conversation. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call on Mr Jonathan Black.

Jonathan Black, New College, Director of the Careers Service

I'm Jonathan Black, Director of the Careers Service and Fellow of New College. Mr Vice-Chancellor, Proctors and members of Congregation, it's interesting to consider that undergraduates who leave this summer will probably be retiring in 2063: that's fifty years' time. We learned from our recent survey of 15,000 Oxford alumni that, on average, in just the first ten years after leaving they have had three

different employers. So learning how to manage a career is an important skill for our undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Even if this Plan covers only the first five of those fifty years, we welcome the Plan that sets, as the seventh challenge, 'to work effectively with all students to enable them to apply the values and intellectual discipline learnt in academic study to their future lives and careers'.

Our employer surveys report that, relative to the average UK student, Oxford students' employability skills are well above average on five of the eight measures, they're about average on one of them, innovation and creativity, but they're actually below average on teamwork and business awareness.

The draft Plan has defined an ambitious target of 'fully equipping graduates for the best of the diverse range of opportunities for study and employment available to them'; to us this means addressing that relative weakness perceived by employers. Unlike almost all other Russell Group universities, we do not have an ambition, nor do we see the need, to embed employability formally in the curriculum but instead to offer useful experiences and opportunities to equip all 20,000 undergraduates and postgraduates to help them manage their careers throughout their life.

Over the last few years, the Careers Service has created new and successful programmes that are unique to Oxford and can support already some of the ambitions in the draft Plan. The following four examples are programmes that provide transferable, co-curricular, employability skills for all students:

The Student Consultancy, in which every term over 100 undergraduate and postgraduate students work in teams of four on real business problems for local organisations ranging from the City Council to Centrica, from the Bodleian Library to local community action groups.

The international Internship Programme that this year will offer about 350 internships around the world, usually hosted with our alumni. Careers is a powerful and productive way to engage alumni; in our recent survey 59% offered to help with mentoring and internships for our students. We'll need their help to achieve the rest of the Strategic Plan which is growing this programme to 1,000 a year.

Insight into Teaching offers 40 students the chance to try out teaching at a local school in ninth week. And it's perhaps not surprising that this is oversubscribed as (contrary to received wisdom) teaching is the single

most popular first career choice for Oxford students. It's not the City.

Fourthly, Springboard for Undergraduate Women is a special Oxford version of this very popular programme for women staff, providing personal development training for all aspects of life for up to 100 students a year. On average, Oxford women graduates' starting salaries are £2,500 lower than their male counterparts; we believe this is primarily because Oxford's women graduates are underaspiring and we have early indications that the Springboard course is helping to raise those aspirations. And our work here reflects ambitions to support women's careers elsewhere in the Strategic Plan.

All of these, and other programmes, added with the more than 6,000 jobs we advertised this year, are open to all; we work to ensure that students, especially from a widening participation background, or with hidden or visible disabilities, feel welcome to take part and benefit.

In 1958, the Appointments Committee for Oxford University considered that there were three essential requirements for a management candidate: 'to have a good brain, to lead a full life while up, and to have contributed something to the University'. We welcome the draft Strategic Plan and the recognition that today, and in the future, we should also provide some specific careers skills training and experiences to help students achieve a full and rewarding life after Oxford.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Professor Jonathan Michie.

Professor Jonathan Michie, President of Kellogg, Director of the Department for Continuing Education

Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, my name is Jonathan Michie, I'm President of Kellogg College and Director of the Department for Continuing Education. Groucho Marx once said, 'I have certain principles, and if you don't like them, I have others.' Now, we welcome the three principles of wider engagement, global reach and interdisciplinarity and we would urge that the University stick with these principles and enhance them, by referencing what the University already does so successfully in these areas which can be built on over the next five years.

On **global reach**, thousands of people across the world are doing University of Oxford online courses through Continuing Education - tutored, assessed, accredited, leading to Oxford Awards of the Certificate of Higher Education.

Oxford University Press, of course, operates globally. The University has some fantastic research groups working not just in Oxford but in countries across Africa and Asia, and many of the University students are international, not just in a sense of having foreign nationalities, but actually living and working in other countries as they study for their postgraduate degrees at Oxford, and many of those programmes have a fantastically beneficial impact on the world across the globe. Probably as we speak, healthcare will be being improved in some country or another through professionals *there* working on health who *here* will be studying for their master's or doctorate in Evidence-based Healthcare.

So we very much welcome the principle of global reach and hope it will be reinforced by those references.

On **interdisciplinarity**, as a graduate of politics, philosophy and economics I've always believed one should draw on the relevant disciplines to study the big issues of the day, but the President of OUSU made a very important point in one of the drafting meetings for this Plan, which is that students at Oxford should also benefit from the interdisciplinarity available in the University, something being done with the Saïd Business School's '1+1' programme, the Social Sciences Division, by sharing modules at postgraduate level, which is something we're also doing in Continuing Education, and we think that could be rolled out, where wanted and carefully managed, across the University. Of course it's very difficult to introduce additional modules in very packed University terms, but a lot of Continuing Education's postgraduate modules are taught in the evenings, at weekends, out of term-time and entirely online.

Now, Oxford is probably one of the world's greatest universities for teaching, probably one of the top research universities, but undoubtedly, without any question, one of the top universities in the world for **wider engagement**. There's no doubt that the University's museum's collections are world leading - Harvard and Oxford are generally regarded as the two best, with I think Oxford being recognised as number one - Harvard and Oxford have the world's two leading continuing education departments and, while it is true that Harvard is still number one, with a little bit more political support, we can certainly overtake Harvard in the next five years. And OUP is undoubtedly the world's leading university press, and wider engagement needs to be both with the public and the world of work. On public

engagement, the University and Continuing Education do a great job, particularly when they're working together, and in the world of work, Isis Innovation, Begbroke Science Park and others do a tremendous job to make sure that Oxford University not only *creates* new ideas but *communicates* those effectively to business and other organisations to promote product and process *innovation*.

So we hope that the Strategic Plan will endorse both those aspects of wider engagement, both *civic engagement* and *business innovation*.

We think if those principles can be reinforced along the lines that I've described, that along with an *implementation* plan to ensure that we achieve those goals, then Oxford will be well placed indeed to help shape the 21st century for the better. Thank you very much.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Mr David Townsend.

Mr David Townsend, St John's, President of the Student Union

Hi, I'm David, I'm a student at St John's College and I'm the President of the Student Union. Mr Vice-Chancellor, Proctors and Assessor, members of Congregation, I speak for 21,563 members of this University - 21,564 if you count me too. (I toted up the numbers before I came over this afternoon.) The student body is far and away the majority of our University community, and we have an interest in this Strategic Plan.

This Congregation, and the University community of which it is the sovereign body, has made its choice about how it sees education: education is not a commodity to be sold *en masse*, undifferentiated across a market, like Midwest hot-rolled steel or West Texas intermediate crude. Nor is education some packaged good, purchased from you as academics like a bag of chips from a 24-hour supermarket. You have decided that education is a partnership between the student and the teacher, between the undergraduate and her tutor, between the research student and his supervisor, and neither of these parties views the other as a service provider. It is, as a partnership must be, a relationship *between equals*, wherein each brings something unique to the relationship. On behalf of the 21,564 student members of our University, I want to corroborate and endorse this view.

It is heartening, therefore, to see in paragraph 11 of the draft Strategic Plan a rejection of education as a mere product, and in paragraph 40 an explicit adoption of partnership as the proper relationship

between the senior membership of the University and the student membership, as represented by their Student Union. If partnership is to have meaning, though, it must be about much more than just the taking in of 'feedback' referred to in that paragraph. When you go home tonight and you talk to your partner and you ask 'What shall we have for dinner?', or you say 'Let's go to the movies; should we see *Anna Karenina* or should we see *Wreck-It Ralph?*', you're not asking for 'feedback' from your partner, you're asking to engage in a *co-decision* with them. And just so must it be between the academic membership and the student membership of this University of ours: the partnership must move forward by co-decision. Every strategic interest must embrace and involve the student membership of the University, and as this Plan is put into effect, its every major implementary act must be the subject of co-decision with the student body through its duly elected representatives at whatever level. In our best and proudest moments in this building, at matriculation and graduation, we talk the talk of students as members of the academic community. I challenge you now to walk the walk.

I must challenge you also to press the University of which you are the sovereign body to fund its Student Union properly to do the job that this Plan, and the University community at large, expects of it. There is no possibility of a meaningful partnership between the academic membership and the student membership of our University, if the latter is deprived of the resources necessary to perform its half of the partnership.

I want to turn now to one of the key priorities of the Strategic Plan: the global reach of our University. It will not have escaped your ears that I - and indeed Suzanne - are not from around these parts. We are both part of the 8,000-strong international student body here at Oxford, drawn as we are from 138 countries running though the alphabet from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. The internationalism of the student body is essential to making Oxford a great centre of learning *of the entire world*. The competition for the world's best students has never been keener, and while Oxford has some historical and aesthetic advantages, it will have no hope of continuing its global pre-eminence unless it targets its philanthropic endeavours on the provision of student scholarships to cover the thousands of students for whom no governmental loan system exists. I contend that this is one of the areas to which paragraph 98 refers, as an area 'where the need is greatest and the strategic goals of the

University are most strongly reflected' and thus our development/fundraising efforts must be concentrated there.

Global reach does not stop at entry, though, it must continue once a student is on course: it must comprehend the reaching out of Oxford's student body, both undergraduate and postgraduate, though exchange programmes, study abroad, and active attendance by students at international conferences. And I am glad to see this recognised in paragraphs 38 and 42.

In sum, if you are serious about this University being a community of 'shared academic enterprise' and having a 'global reach', the Strategic Plan and its various implementary acts:

- must embrace true co-decision between students and academics;
- must prioritise the provision of student scholarships for those outside the government loan system; and
- must make sure that an Oxford education is outward-looking, so that the Oxford of the 21st century is not a bubble, but a hub.

Members of Congregation, I thank you for your time this afternoon.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Professor William James.

Professor William James, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources), Brasenose, Sir William Dunn School of Pathology

Mr Vice-Chancellor, fellow members of Congregation, my name is William James, I'm Professor of Virology and Fellow of Brasenose College and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Planning and Resources. Pluralistic organisations, like Oxford, with numerous autonomous sub-units and overlapping memberships, are an effective way to handle challenging, variable and intellectually demanding environments. They harness the creativity and expertise of individuals more effectively and more responsively than many more standard organisational types. However, to work coherently and harmoniously, it is recognised that they need to articulate **shared aims**, to have a good set of **rules** for operation, and to have effective **governance** procedures. The five-yearly cycle of producing a Strategic Plan is therefore not merely an exercise for HEFCE, but a valuable way of agreeing our shared aims in changing circumstances.

My job is to anticipate the practical implications of the high-level academic objectives expressed in the Strategic

Plan, and to orchestrate the University's resources appropriately. I must do this in such a way that not only the new developments but also the continuing activities of the University can be sustained into the foreseeable future. At its heart, this planning, as reflected in the enabling sections of the Plan, concerns ensuring that the human, physical and organisational assets that are essential for achieving our academic aims are adequately developed and maintained.

Stephen Goss has already spoken to you on the topic of recruiting, developing and rewarding academic **staff** of the highest calibre.

The most significant **physical** asset, in financial terms, is our **estate**, and the enabling sections of the Plan include the main ways in which we envisage renewing and replacing the estate to achieve the academic strategies affordably. These are developed in much greater detail in the related draft Estates Strategy, which is currently being consulted upon, and I offer the following illustration. The strategic aim of reducing the barriers to **interdisciplinary working** will in part be achieved by putting particular emphasis on developing research and teaching facilities that are used by multiple departments and faculties, sometimes across divisional boundaries. This should have the happy additional consequence of ensuring our new buildings are flexible enough to respond to future changes in need. Shared use and temporal flexibility both tend to generate efficiencies, so that more academic benefits can be gained from a given resource.

In a similar vein, the Plan refers to some high-level objectives relating to **information technology** infrastructure that directly addresses the key academic objectives of the Plan. For example, IT systems can help us facilitate academic collaboration and **data sharing** within Oxford and **across continents** in ways that again enhance our academic endeavours, and, in some key areas, reduce the cost of our work. Council's new IT Committee is overseeing the development of a more detailed IT Strategy that builds on these ideas, and it will be put out for consultation later in the year.

Following on from the recent review of the Oxford Thinking Campaign, we now embrace philanthropic **fundraising** as an integral part of our approach to financing these areas of capital expenditure, and consequently bind the Development Campaign ever more tightly into the University's strategic planning.

Each of these areas in turn is underpinned by a new **financial strategy** that will explicitly inform all our investment and expenditure decisions. We will continue to evaluate the level of cash surplus required in order to support the net costs of maintaining, renewing and replacing our developing capital assets. At the moment, we believe that the right level is 5% of expenditure, and this is predicted to rise in future years as the value and complexity of our organisational and physical capital is anticipated to rise. To hold to this target, we will continue to develop and implement value-for-money measures throughout the University, and constrain administrative expenditure through planned productivity gains.

If these coordinated enabling strategies are properly refined and implemented, the result should be a progressive enhancement of the material conditions necessary for the highest academic endeavour in Oxford.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Thank you. Are there any other members of Congregation who wish to speak? If not, then I now ask Dr Mapstone to make any final points and to conclude the Discussion.

Dr Sally Mapstone

Thank you, Vice-Chancellor. Well, we've heard support for the draft Plan's direction of travel and its ambit from heads of three of the academic divisions and from the Director of the Department for Continuing Education. The Chair of the Conference of Colleges has also indicated how it consorts with the Conference's way of seeing and with the complementarity of the colleges as international and interdisciplinary bodies. I hope, too, that the comments from the P-V-Cs for Research, Planning and Resources, and Personnel and Equality, have provided some useful context for the sections of the draft Plan that they've both overseen and discussed today.

Perhaps I could just briefly say something from my own particular ambit of education. I'd want to reiterate the emphasis placed in the draft Plan on the importance of the distinctive, personalised and high-quality learning experience that Oxford is committed to continuing to offer. While acknowledging that that too can respond to the new priorities of interdisciplinarity and global reach in the next planning period, we would intend to discuss in divisions, with colleges, and with our students, those places in or around our undergraduate and graduate degrees where it makes most sense to introduce greater interdisciplinarity and international opportunity, and the

Department for Continuing Education may have things to teach us here. As we've heard, the draft Plan also looks at enhancing the student experience and the employability of our students in ways that can usefully engage and build on the work of the Careers Service. Speaking momentarily in one of my other hats, as Chair for the Committee for the Language Centre, I can add that that group has endorsed the draft Plan in similar terms.

OUSU have engaged in the drafting of the Plan with independence and thoughtfulness throughout the process. They have throughout challenged us to include students as meaningfully as possible and they have done so again today, and we will take their comments on board as we consider revision.

I'm grateful to the other members of Congregation who have taken the time to come here today and to discuss their reading of the Plan. Dr Pirie's comments on the importance of interdisciplinarity

having a clearly articulated base are important. I think they nevertheless do chime with those of Professor Halliday and indeed those of Professor Walmsley on the significance of strong core disciplines. I don't think there's disagreement about that. Interdisciplinarity needs to be good, and it frequently needs to emerge from a strong sense of the core disciplines that inform it. In talking about the promotion of sequenced interdisciplinary learning as far as our student body was concerned, what we were getting at was the notion again that students need to proceed from a sense of strong core disciplines into interdisciplinary study where it makes sense - in the later parts of a degree course or in the later parts of a student's career.

Dr Tseng's comments on administration will be resonant to many people, including administrators. I hope they already find some consonance in, for example, paragraph 82 of the Plan, which speaks of the importance of reducing costs by a more

proactive approach to value for money and sharing of services. Administration for its own sake should be an anathema to this University.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, I am by discipline a textual critic and I have spent much of my career as a tutor and as a scholar and as an administrator suggesting rewrites to other people's work, so I understand entirely the impulse that has led to some of the comments that have been made today, but I appreciate too that those comments are not only about presentation. They are about lucidity, good, plain speaking and succinct iteration being the hallmarks of a clear and convincing mission. In revising the draft Plan, we will seek to give you more of that. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: That concludes this afternoon's Discussion. I want to thank all of you for participating, and especially to thank OUSU for my Valentine. Thank you.