



Oxford University Student Union

Divisional Board Representatives

Handbook
2007-2008

Being a Divisional Board Representative

By representing students on a Divisional Board, you have the chance to influence decision-making processes that will affect students across the University. To help you in your work, this guide provides an introduction to the governance procedures in the University and information on some of the major recent discussions that have taken place in the University. It also includes ideas to think about when representing students.

Student representation at Divisional level is of particular importance, both as a lobbying tool and as a monitoring device. As a member of the Divisional Board you can lobby for improvements in the provision and quality of teaching and facilities in your Division. You are also responsible for monitoring that the effects of policies on students are considered, and that your Division continues to maintain the high standards of educational provision.

It is important for you to liaise with the Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs) and Graduate Joint Consultative Committees (GJCCs) of the faculties within your Division, and with OUSU. This is to ensure that you are aware of the issues within the faculties, and that the JCCs and GJCCs are kept informed of decisions made in Divisional Board that may have a direct impact on teaching provision and resources within their faculties.

The OUSU Vice-President (Access and Academic Affairs) and Vice-President (Graduates), represent students on Education Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC), one of the highest academic-policy making committees in the University. Your views and information about decisions within your Division are important in informing our work. We can also provide guidance to you, including contact details, OUSU policy and recent issues of concern.

We hope to hold regular meetings this year between Divisional Board Reps, JCC and GJCC reps to facilitate communication, as well as ensuring that we gain the most out of representation on University committees.

If you have any more questions about anything in this Guide, do not hesitate to get in touch.

We look forward to working with you over the next academic year.

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Divisional Boards

The new University Governance Structure came into effect in 2000. As part of the changes, five Divisional Boards were created. These were later reduced in 2006 to four academic Divisions (along with Continuing Education), which are:

Humanities

www.humanities.ox.ac.uk

Comprised of Rothermere American Institute; Classics Faculty; English Language and Literature; History Faculty; Linguistics & Phonetics; Medieval and Modern Languages Faculty; Music Faculty; Oriental Studies Faculty; Philosophy Faculty; Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art; Theology Faculty; Voltaire Foundation.

Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS)

www.mpls.ox.ac.uk

Comprised of Chemistry, Computing Laboratory, Earth Sciences, Engineering Sciences, E-Research Centre, Materials, Mathematical Institute, Physics, Plant Sciences, Statistics, Zoology.

Medical Sciences

www.medsci.ox.ac.uk

Comprised of Anaesthetics; Biochemistry; Cardiovascular Medicine; Clinical Laboratory Sciences; Nuffield Department of Clinical Medical; Clinical Neurology; Clinical Pharmacology; Clinical Vaccinology and Tropical Medicine Centre; Experimental Psychology; Medical Oncology; Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine; Obstetrics & Gynaecology; Ophthalmology, Orthopaedic Surgery; Department of Paediatrics; Peter Medawar building for Pathogen Research; Pathology; Pharmacology; Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics; Psychiatry; Public Health; Radiation, Oncology and Biology; Surgery.

Social Sciences

www.socsci.ox.ac.uk

Comprised of School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography; School of Archaeology; School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies; Economics; Education Studies; Centre for the Environment; Faculty of Law; Management (Said Business School); Oxford Internet Institute; Oxford-Man Institute of Quantitative Finance; Politics and International Relations; Department of International Development; Social Policy and Social Work; Sociology.

Divisional Board Responsibilities

Divisional Boards oversee the management, operation, personnel, standards and direction of their sub-units (e.g. departments or faculties). Although day-to-day running is largely delegated to the different faculties, any major changes, the strategic direction and relations between sub-units are decided by the Divisional Board.

A complete list of the Divisional Boards' responsibilities can be found at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/gov/divbd.shtml.

Among these responsibilities, the most important for a Divisional Board Rep are:

- The "oversight of the organisation, development, and delivery of curricula in collaboration with the colleges".
- The "oversight and development of the general context of research, in the broad subject area covered by the division".
- The "maintenance of educational quality and standards in the broad subject areas".
- The "general oversight of and responsibility for all matters concerning budgets, space, syllabus, and staffing"
- The "consideration of reports of examiners and the budgets, syllabus and staffing across the sub-units of the division:.

Divisional Board Meetings

The Divisional Boards are much more formal than JCC and GJCC meetings. Some of the papers and discussions in the meetings are confidential and must not be published or discussed outside of the meeting. The Divisional Boards also have 'Reserved Business' at which point the student representatives are asked to leave. Divisional Board Representatives do not have votes on the Committees and will be classed only as 'Observers'. You are allowed to contribute to discussions on all business considered in the Unreserved section of the meeting.

Being a Divisional Board Representative

The most important role of Divisional Board Representatives will be representing students. Remember you are there to work for students and represent their views rather than your own.

The Divisional Boards meet twice a term. It is important that you attend as many of the meetings as possible. If you cannot attend, it is polite to send apologies to the Secretary of the Committee in advance. OUSU spends a lot of time campaigning for extra student representation, and we will only be given votes on these committees if the University sees students playing a constructive and responsible role in University Committees.

Acting as a Student Representative on the Divisional Boards will be a difficult task. A JCC or GJCC Rep deals with issues of which they have direct experience as a student in their subject. However, Divisions have many different subjects under them. It is impossible for any Student Representative to contribute knowledgeably on all agenda items. This does not mean that you are not doing your job properly: it is just the nature of the committee.

To ensure that you represent students as effectively as possible, it is important that you liaise with the JCC or GJCC Offices before and after each meeting. The Vice-President (Access & Academic Affairs) and Vice-President (Graduates) will organise meetings with JCC, GJCC and College Academic Affairs Reps so that you can provide feedback and discuss issues with these groups. The OUSU Vice-Presidents will also be available to help answer any questions that arise or if you wish to discuss non-confidential matters from the meetings, so for example, if you are unsure of the implications of a policy proposal.

The most important thing you can do is to ensure that JCC and GJCC Representatives in the subjects you cover know who you are and how to approach you. There may be times when JCC and GJCC Representatives ask you to speak about issues that they feel particularly strongly about. You will also be involved in making decisions that directly affect other subject areas. It is important that you report back on decisions made (allowing for confidentiality) so that Common Room Academic Affairs Officers, JCC and GJCC Representatives know what is going on. You might want to consider writing brief reports after meetings that can then be sent over email to JCC and GJCC Reps and the OUSU Academic Affairs Committee email list.

Understanding the University.

Trying to campaign for change in Oxford is a complicated business. This is due in part to traditions that are held in great esteem by many academics and administrators, but probably more because of the University's structure. The University comprises three main components: the Central Bodies and Administration; the Colleges; and the Divisions, Departments and Faculties. A diagram of this structure can be found at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/aboutoxford/structure.shtml>

The most important body in the University is Congregation, which meets very occasionally to debate and decide issues of particular importance. This comprises the 3,700 members of the University's academic and administrative staff, and has ultimate responsibility for all legislative matters, able to discuss and pronounce on policies proposed by University Council. It could be considered akin to a Parliament. This democratic structure of the University is unique to Oxford and Cambridge.

The most important committee in the University is University Council. Council is a Committee that meets regularly in term time to run the activities of the University. Students have representation on Council but the student representatives do not have voting rights. Council is the body that makes the most important decisions in the University.

There are four major committees below Council: EPSC, General Purposes Committee, Planning and Resource Allocation Committee, and Personnel Committee. The most important in terms of Academic Affairs issues is Educational Policy and Standards Committee (EPSC), which is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). EPSC is responsible for access and admissions; curriculum design and course structure; teaching, learning and assessment; academic and pastoral support and guidance; and the administration and review of the Divisional Boards. This committee has an extremely important role to play in affecting students' time at Oxford. Students have two representatives on EPSC – these are the Vice President (Access and Academic Affairs) and the Vice-President (Graduates).

There are also more minor committees under Council, such as Student Health and Welfare, Investments and the Joint Committee with Students. OUSU executive members sit on Student Health and Welfare and the Joint Committee with Students. There is also Academic Services and University Collections (ASUC), which oversees the University Libraries, ICT, Careers Service and Museums. There are also student representatives on many of these committees.

Underneath Council there are the Four Divisions, each headed by a Divisional Board. All of the subjects studied at Oxford will now have a Divisional Board who is responsible for it. Some subjects like Philosophy, Politics and Economics will fall under two divisions.

The Central Administration is primarily based in Wellington Square and carries out the decisions of University Committees, and ensures the day-to-day running of the University, from admissions to exams. They could be described as the University's Civil Service, who support Council and the four major committees (along with all other University

Committees), while also running central University services like the International Office, the Graduate Office, the Disability Office and Student Finance and Access Office. Some elements of the University's administration are scattered about the city. These include Service Units (such as the Computing or Careers Service), which work within general rules set out by a Committee that oversees their activities.

Separate to the University structure are the 39 Colleges and 8 PPHs. The Colleges are autonomous bodies, which have very broad commercial freedom due to their independence from the University. Most are run by a Governing Body made up of College Fellows. Colleges have recognised that their interests are generally best served by co-operating with each other and with the Central University. Cross-College bodies such as the Conference of Colleges and the Admissions Committee encourage Colleges to adopt similar practices and policies. College members are elected from the Conference of Colleges to sit on major University committees to promote communication. However, most of the time, Colleges like to reaffirm their independence by doing things in subtly different ways from each other, or from whatever the University or OUSU suggests.

The result of this system is that power is diffused among Colleges, the central bodies and administration, and the departments and faculties. The University runs partly through cumulative momentum and partly through thorough deft behind the scenes communications between Colleges, Committees, University Bodies and Administrators. No-one is actually in charge, so to bring about any deep and long lasting change in the University is an immensely difficult and time consuming task, which involves lobbying college bodies, faculties and university committees separately and being prepared to modify, sacrifice and adapt proposals many times over.

Recent University Discussions

University Governance

Discussions about the Governance structure of the University occupied much of 2006, and though the proposals were voted down, the importance and controversial nature of the debate means that knowledge of its background is probably worthwhile. All sides of the debate recognised that changes needed to be made to the Universities governance structures, so it is unlikely to remain a quiet or forgotten issue for very long.

The last Governance review proposed splitting University Council into a board of trustees, responsible for financial oversight and including external members, and an Academic Board. The latter would have responsibility for the day-to-day management of the University's academic affairs. These proposals were controversial because of the perceived power a trustee board would have over the University's finances and, according to critics, its management. The involvement of external members in such decisions was also perceived to end a tradition of self-governance and democracy in the University.

OUSU policy supported the Governance proposals, although such support was not unanimous across all students.

JRAM

The Joint Resource Allocation Mechanism (JRAM) are the principles by which money is allocated to the Colleges and departments of the University. Discussions over its reform occupied much of the 2006-2007 academic year. Central to JRAM is the 'as earned' principle, whereby departments and colleges are allocated money according to how it is earned, whether this occurs through research grants or teaching. This is to provide an incentive for these groups to raise the quality of their research, while at the same time not sacrificing teaching provision. As undergraduates cost more to teach than is currently funded, a tax from other activities directed towards undergraduate teaching is included within the mechanism. The changes will also be implemented over a series of years so Colleges and departments can respond optimally to the new incentives.

Bologna Process

This is an intergovernmental initiative that aims to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide. Its broad objectives are to remove obstacles to student mobility across Europe; to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide; to establish a common structure of higher education systems across Europe; and for this common structure to be based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.

Oxford University is following developments on Bologna, especially moves to standardise the size, shape and patterns of degree programmes and to attribute credits for successful periods of study. Certain subjects, at the moment within MPLS, are examining how programmes of study might be credit rated to establish what changes may be necessary for degrees to become Bologna compliant.

Due to the different patterns of operations in other Universities, it is worth considering how adaptations to programmes of study to become compliant with Bologna will affect the current standard of provision supplied to students.

Burgess Report

This is a government-commissioned report regarding degrees and the way they are presented by Universities and seen by employers. In summary, the report calls for greater standardisation in the way institutions award degrees, through adopting credit systems within degrees and adopting uniform pass procedures of distinction (top 5% of students in a year), pass or fail. Additional detail on actual marks and position of the year, along with other programmes of study such as IT, will also be provided on any transcript.

OUSU has policy against judging students on the percentile they reach in their year, rather than the standards they achieve as an individual. There are also concerns about the construction of a credit system based on contact time, as this may disadvantage students who study mainly through private reading and research. Nonetheless, OUSU policy supports a credit system where it is feasible because it will assist students who wish to move to a different University.

Size and Shape

The University is conducting a consultation on its size (the number of students) and shape (the mix of undergraduates, taught-graduates and research-graduates, and the relative size and composition of each department), which is likely to reach Divisional Boards this year. OUSU does not have any specific policy on this issue yet, but will be consulting with all students in due course. However, OUSU policy has previously emphasised the importance of preserving the tutorial system and maintaining the world-class quality of educational provision at Oxford. Discussions on size and shape should be considered with this central principle in mind.

Radcliffe Infirmary

The Radcliffe Infirmary is being redeveloped as a central home for the Humanities department. This will include a divisional library, offices and teaching and learning space. Plans have been submitted for approval, and though these changes have substantial benefits in the future, it is important that current students are not inconvenienced unnecessarily in the interim period (for example, access to library resources).

New Bodleian

To retain the copyright status, the Bodleian is being upgraded. The investment will build a new depository at Osney Mead that will protect many of the libraries books, while still allowing relatively quick access to them when required. The new Bodleian will also be renovated so that more collections can be put on display and there is greater learning space.

Student Information Systems

The University is developing central electronic databases to oversee and coordinate students university careers, from admissions to graduation. These include self-registration

and self-selection of different modules during a course. Any changes should help improve the student experience, and remain user friendly and secure.

Embedding Graduate Studies

This is an agenda coming particularly from the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) which is likely to be much-discussed over the coming year, as a high priority. Its main aim is to ensure that Graduate Studies are embedded as a core activity of the colleges, departments and faculties across the University, especially as a result of the large increase in graduate student numbers in recent years. The agenda will focus on provision for graduate students, in terms of space to work, supervision, funding, skills training, facilities, induction, teaching, accommodation, monitoring progress etc. OUSU is keen to work closely with EPSC and the colleges, departments and faculties on this agenda, hoping to ensure that its aims are achieved. Codes of practice for supervision is one key area, and something the VP (Graduates) will be looking at are the complaints procedures for graduates, particularly in small departments.

Ideas to Consider

Study Skill Support for New Students

Many students arrive at Oxford unfamiliar with the private study demand from a degree. Most make a quick transition and quickly start achieving their potential. Other students however can struggle with the new environment, and currently have little support in adjusting to University methods of study. You may wish to consider ideas, for example introductory lectures or seminars, which introduce students to key resources and provide hints and tips on studying effectively at Oxford. Such programs may also be beneficial to other students as part of general personal development.

Interdisciplinary Modules

There is an increasing amount of interdisciplinary research conducted at Oxford, as different fields of studies benefit from sharing insights with each other. In some joint schools there are modules that have materials and ideas that cross over between the disciplines, allowing skills and insights from all parts of a students course to be used. Other single honour schools may benefit from the opportunity to undertake programmes of study that are interdisciplinary in nature, while joint schools may benefit from a greater number of interdisciplinary modules. You may want to consider encouraging the Division to adapt syllabuses to include interdisciplinary work and research.

Methods of Assessment for Undergraduates

Many Oxford programmes of study, especially those in social sciences and humanities, rely on Finals sat at the end of the third year to determine a student's degree classification. This is usually an incredibly stressful period for students and may not be the best method of assessment. Some programmes of study offer students the option to undertake optional thesis, but the take up tends to be very low because of a perception that these will be greater work than other modules. Other programmes of study have begun experimenting with splitting the exam burden between second and third years, or with continuous assessment through extended essays or thesis. In a research led University, methods of assessments that are not purely exam based may be beneficial for all students, as part of a broader education. You may want to consider encouraging your Division to expand the methods of assessment for your programmes of study so that students have a greater range of opportunities.

JCC and GJCC Representation

The effectiveness of JCC and GJCC representation across the University is patchy. Some JCC and GJCC representatives are elected in lectures from amongst their whole course. Others are co-opted by tutors with no accountability to other students. You may want to consider encouraging your division to increasing the support to JCC and GJCC so that these important feedback mechanisms can operate effectively. This could include encouraging a number of elected JCC and GJCC representatives from each year, and greater publicity as to who these representatives are.

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