



Oxford University Student Union

# Joint Consultative Committee Representatives

Handbook  
2007-2008

## Welcome to the OUSU Guide for JCC Representatives

Academic matters in Oxford are mostly run by faculties and departments; not by the University. The way that students' opinions can affect what happens is if they go to meetings of their faculty's Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). Most of the faculties and departments in Oxford have a JCC. The organisation of JCCs varies between subjects. Some subjects have a rep from each college, whereas others elect a small number of people each year in core lectures. JCCs are made up of student reps, subject tutors and department staff.

You are the person who can help improve how your faculty teaches students and how it runs itself. Use your JCC to tell the faculty what the students in your subject want and need from their faculty. JCCs are important because they provide an opportunity for interactive discussion and feedback between students and academics. They give students the chance to make their feelings known and have an important function in collecting and communicating students' opinions in an organised way.

This handbook explains how undergraduate education in Oxford is organised and how your JCC fits into this. It contains information to help you make suggestions and contribute to discussions in your JCC – on issues from library photocopying facilities and heating, to syllabus changes and examiners reports.

OUSU and JCCs need to work closely together, to ensure that students' views are best represented. If difficult issues arise within the JCC and you need advice, or if you want to develop a JCC website, OUSU can help. We hope to arrange meetings between JCC Reps and your Divisional Board Reps this year to discuss the issues we have all be working on and share ideas.

If you have any questions about anything in this guide or in your JCC, do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

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

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## The University's Structure

As with everything else in Oxford, the structure of who is responsible for which academic issue appears to be very complicated. However, it is easier to understand than it seems at first.

Responsibility for undergraduate academic affairs is split between the University and the colleges. Broadly speaking, colleges tend to be responsible for organising the bulk of direct teaching, whereas the university is responsible for providing central facilities, designing the course and organising lectures, arranging examinations, and, where relevant, practicals. Individual faculties are basically independent, like the colleges, but major faculty decisions have to be approved by the University.

Between the central University and faculties or departments are the four Divisions: Humanities; Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences; Medical Sciences and Social Sciences. Annexe A of this guide gives a list of which faculties belong to which Divisions. 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. There are two student places, for an undergraduate and a graduate, who observe and contribute to discussions in Divisional Boards.

Most of the decisions about programmes of study are taken by the faculties and departments responsible for running the courses. You should have input through your JCC into decisions made by your faculty or department's Divisional Board and they should consult you about major plans and ideas that they have. Useful people to get to know include the Divisional Board Reps, the faculty or department head and any administrators (such as the faculty secretary) responsible for liaising with the JCC.

If you are interested in the structures of the University, more information can be found at: <http://www.ousu.org/info/academic-affairs-resources/rough-guide-to-the-universitys-structure/>.

## Joint Consultative Committee Meetings

Your JCC meetings will probably have a formal structure. The students there are usually called the "junior members" and the tutors are the "senior members". As JCCs are all run separately, it isn't possible to give a complete description of what will happen, so this is a very rough guide to what the procedure is likely to be. Being a JCC rep doesn't take up a huge amount of time unless you decide to stand for a position on the committee. There are usually 1-2 meetings per term. A good idea to enhance co-ordination among student reps is to establish an email list where you can discuss issues of concern to students before the meeting.

### **Before the Meeting...**

You will probably be sent a written agenda and a copy of the minutes of the last meeting. Some of the items on the agenda may have papers for you to read before the meeting – so you know what is going on and can contribute to the discussion.

If there are things you want to discuss, you may be able to put them on the agenda by contacting the chair or secretary of the committee in advance. If you are doing this, it can sometimes be useful to write a short paper explaining the issue, so that tutors get a chance to think about it first. As the tutors are usually involved in the department for quite a long time – and you are only a JCC rep for a maximum of 3 years or so – they often know lots of relevant information. You will get further with your request if you prepare for the meeting so that you can present your suggestion in a way that gets support – and so that you feel confident when doing so. It can make the meeting easier if you've discussed things with other student reps beforehand and reached an agreement on what you want. Discussing something informally with senior members first can also get support for your idea.

If you would like any help preparing papers for JCC meetings you can get in touch with the VP (Access and Academic Affairs) who can provide advice and guidance.

### **The Meeting Itself...**

The meeting will start with apologies from people who couldn't come to it – if you can't go then you can send apologies to the chair – a sentence long note or email doesn't take long.

The chair will ask if there are any matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting, which you should have received in advance. Those people who were at the last meeting will probably also be asked if the minutes correctly record the meeting – you can ask for amendments if they do not. You can also check whether people have done the things they said they would do and comment on any changes, which have happened since the last meeting.

During the meeting, if you want to speak, you do so through the chair to prevent separate conversations between individuals developing. If no one else is speaking, you can probably just begin speaking, although you may have to attract the chair's attention. At the end, the chair will ask if there is any other business and you can bring up anything else that you want to discuss. Don't be afraid to speak at any point – if you are assertive you will achieve more.

## Publicising your JCC

Only a minority of students know that JCCs exist; even fewer students understand their function. You also have a responsibility to let students know what you are doing and how you are representing them.

### Why should I publicise my JCC?

- You're supposed to be representing student views to your faculty, not just your own view. To do this effectively you need to discover what other students' views are.
- Students are forever complaining about their work, their tutors, their lectures, their course, but most of the time their frustration is expressed only to their friends and valuable ideas are lost because people don't know they can usefully tell their JCC rep.
- You probably don't want to be a JCC rep during your finals. If you involve others then finding a replacement for you will be much easier.

### How can I publicise my JCC?

- Talk to your friends informally – let them know what the JCC does and find out their views on what the faculty does.
- Use the notice-board in the department, the faculty library or the laboratory to publicise the JCC. Find out who is in charge of the official board and get permission to put up a notice.
- If there is a faculty email list, ask if you can post the agenda for the JCC meeting and ask for comments on it from students.
- Make an announcement at the end of a well-attended lecture.
- Encourage the department to include an introduction to the JCC in their induction programme for freshers and in their faculty handbook.
- You could set up, or get the faculty to set up more feedback/suggestions mechanisms, e.g. a suggestions book in the faculty library, a box for comments after lectures.
- You could set up a JCC website with an area for students to comment on the work of the JCC or to suggest areas for improvement. There is web-space available on [www.ousu.org](http://www.ousu.org) for JCCs to have their own web pages – for more details email [access@ousu.org](mailto:access@ousu.org)

### What information should I publicise?

That's up to you. A few ideas:

- What a JCC is – a route for students' comments to reach the people in charge.
- Who the reps are, with email addresses, so students can get their views and ideas expressed at the JCC meeting.
- Minutes and Agendas from JCC meetings, allowing students to see what has been discussed.
- If the faculty agrees to implement one of the things students have been pressing for, it is important that you publicise your success. Students will then see that their JCC can be effective on their behalf.

## Working with Divisional Board Reps

In 2000 the new University governance structure came into operation, so that each subject in the University comes under the supervision of one of the four Divisional Boards. As a JCC rep it is essential that you work and co-ordinate with the student rep on your Divisional Board. Each division has two student reps – one for graduates and undergraduates.

The Divisional Boards will make lots of decisions that affect the way your department and course operates including funding allocation. If you want your opinions heard by the University it is essential that you communicate and work with the student rep for your Divisional Board. We hope to arrange meetings between JCC Reps and your Divisional Board Reps this year to discuss the issues we have all be working on and share ideas. You may also want to encourage your department to establish a Divisional JCC so that all the JCC Reps and Divisional Board Reps can meet with the chairman and vice-chairman of the Division on a regular basis.

JCCs are important and can achieve positive results for students. Most of the issues that JCCs encounter are continually changing but some are ongoing. As a JCC rep you will deal with many areas of concern for the faculty and its students. Some issues are of a practical nature, such as the provision of photocopiers or computers. Other issues are more complicated and controversial. In recent years faculties have been instrumental in making decisions about teaching provision (stint reform) and in establishing good quality assurance mechanisms. As a JCC rep you should be conscious of broader issues such as the performance of women, students with disabilities and minority students in examinations in your subject, the financial situation of your faculty etc. It is important that JCC reps handover and discuss their experiences with their predecessors and successors to maintain a high standard of awareness of the issues.

To ensure that you represent students as effectively as possible, it is important that you communicate with the other JCC Reps and Divisional Board Reps before and after each meeting. The Vice-President (Access & Academic Affairs) and Vice-President (Graduates) will organise meetings with JCC, GJCC, Divisional Board 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.

## Ideas to Consider

You may have many ideas for your JCC to promote changes that improve the student experience. Some broad areas you may want to consider in addition to your own ideas are:

### **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 student's course to be used. Other single honour schools may benefit from the opportunity to study courses 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**

Many Oxford courses, 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 courses 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 courses 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 courses 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 increase the support to JCC and GJCC so that these important feedback mechanisms can operate effectively. This could include encouraging a number of elected JCC representatives from each year, and greater publicity as to who these representatives are.

## Annexe A

### 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.

## Annexe B

### Contact Information

#### OUSU

Vice President (Access and Academic Affairs): James Lamming  
[access@ousu.org](mailto:access@ousu.org) 01865 (2)88464

Vice President (Graduates): Ingrid Frater  
[graduates@ousu.org](mailto:graduates@ousu.org) 01865 (2)88463

### Divisional Board Secretaries

#### Humanities

Head: Professor Sally Shuttleworth  
[sally.shuttleworth@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sally.shuttleworth@admin.ox.ac.uk) 01865 (2)70557

Secretary: Dr P R Gambles  
[peter.gambles@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:peter.gambles@admin.ox.ac.uk) 01865 (2)70555

#### MPLS

Head: Professor Alex Halliday  
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Secretary: Ms Mary Ann Robertson  
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#### Medical Sciences

Head: Dr Kenneth A. Fleming  
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Secretary: Dr D E H Bryan  
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#### Social Sciences

Head: Dr Michael Spence  
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