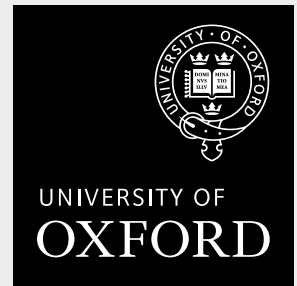


# Gazette Supplement



## Oration by the demitting Proctors and Assessor 2022

The following Oration was delivered in Congregation on 16 March by Ms Lucinda Rumsey, Fellow of Mansfield, on demitting office as Senior Proctor, by Dr David Johnson, Fellow of St Antony's, on demitting office as Junior Proctor, and by Dr Bettina Lange, Fellow of Wolfson, on demitting office as Assessor.

**Senior Proctor:** *Insignissima Vice-Cancellaria, licetne anglie loqui?*

**Vice-Chancellor:** *Licet.*

**Senior Proctor:** I am a tutor in medieval literature so I'll begin in Middle English.

The narrator of *Gawain and the Green Knight* tells us, as Gawain gets ready for his journey:

A ȝere ȝernes ful ȝerne, and ȝeldeȝ  
neuer lyke,  
ȝe forme to ȝe fynyſment foldeȝ ful  
ſelden.

A year passes very fast and what it  
yields is not the same,  
The beginning seldom folds neatly  
onto the end.

That has been our experience as Proctors and Assessor. We started our year online. My University colleagues sat in Teams meetings in front of backgrounds of the Oxford skyline, as though wearing the spire of St Mary's church as a unicorn horn, or the Radcliffe Camera as a bonnet. After some forwards and backwards steps, we are ending the year here, and in person. Like Sir Gawain we are at the end of our quest. Gawain came home a bit hacked about and miserable. I think our journey has been much less traumatic.

We begin with the Assessor.

**Assessor:** The academic year 2021/22 continued to present many challenges for the governance of the academic and social life of the collegiate University. It has been inspiring to see how agile, flexible and timely the University crisis management framework, including

Silver and Bronze committees, has been in responding to the changing situation.

In this difficult year the core of the Assessorial role - student welfare, health and financial resources - was as relevant as ever, and was significantly supported financially from the Vice-Chancellor's Fund, the Oxford Hardship Fund and the dedicated COVID-19 Assistance Fund. My role also provided an opportunity to understand how student welfare, health and financial resources relate to the much wider range of University administration - the maintenance of buildings, audit and scrutiny processes, and environmental sustainability, as well as the innovative work of the Staff Wellbeing Programme Board, and the discussion and implementation of education policy across the collegiate University.

In my work this year I was reminded of the depiction of *The City and the City* by China Miéville, which describes Ul Quoma and Beszel, two distinct cities which simultaneously occupy the same urban space, but whose citizens have to 'unsee' each other. This seems to be a fitting metaphor for the University: 'Welly Square over there' and 'academic departments over here', two cities at first glance, characterised by different languages, different ways of working and different ways of seeing the world. But in *The City and the City*, as in the University, there is 'cross-hatching' or 'seeing across' space where the two cities exist together.

One way in which I have seen this cross-hatching between parts of the University to be effective this year is in the collection and interpretation of data by professional services and by academic departments, in collaborative projects which have generated many innovative and impressive governance initiatives, such as the Health and Safety Review, the Race Equality Task Force, the Mental Health Task Force (including work on the draft Drugs Policy), and the

Environmental Sustainability Committee, as well as in the Sustainability Team, who are establishing, amongst a range of other initiatives, a biodiversity baseline for the functional University estate, in order to measure progress towards the target of a net biodiversity gain by 2035. Continuing collaborative work of this kind in the collegiate University will also be essential for progressing policy on the handling of non-academic misconduct, including harassment and sexual violence, and for developing more harmonised procedures across colleges.

It has been an honour and a humbling experience to serve in the Assessor role, and to see across 'The City and the City'. I should like to thank everyone I have worked with during this year, especially the Proctors' Office and the bedels.

**Senior Proctor:** The Junior Proctor and I would like to echo the Assessor's thanks and add our thanks to her for her hard work and wisdom this year.

As Proctors and Assessor we sit on more than eighty University committees, so it surprised colleagues a bit when in our first week we asked to join more: the committees of the Race Equality Task Force. I found those meetings in the early months of our year a valuable lens through which to get early glimpses of the work of the University, and to have conversations with staff and students about access and equality which continued throughout the year. A strand of those conversations was how we might diversify representation on University committees. One challenge of this is that University structures and nomination for committees can be complicated (even eligibility to be a Congregation member is a bit opaque and I was surprised by the number of University roles for which membership of Congregation is a requirement). I hope that we might do more in future to make the purpose and the process of University

committees more transparent, and involve the Equality and Diversity leads in divisions and colleges in encouraging greater engagement. However, even when colleagues understand what University committees do, it is understandable that they are reluctant to volunteer for service which adds to their workload. If we want to encourage a greater variety of voices in University decision-making, we will need to recognise that service, and reward it by including it as a part of stint or duties, rather than it being an additional burden. Because volunteers don't come forward too often we end up picking from those in the room around us, and reinforcing rather than diversifying the views represented.

One example of good practice in committee representation I have admired this year is the MPLS Divisional Board. The board reinforce research as central to their divisional life with research highlights at every meeting; openness and representation is embedded, with standing items for early career research staff and students; and there is meaningful regular reporting on the work of their brilliantly dynamic Equality and Diversity team.

Finally I want to acknowledge the contribution of external members on University committees (such as Council and Audit and Scrutiny), and beyond (the work of OUEM and OUP Finance Committee). The challenge and example provided by external members who generously bring their expertise and their different perspectives has been really helpful in committee discussion. I have particular appreciated the high value that our external members place on the reputation of the University, its work and its staff. Sometimes they express and promote the importance of the work that Oxford does better than we do ourselves.

Extraordinary work has been done by the University in the pandemic, worldwide through the impact of our vaccine research, and more domestically in the work of staff across the University, who have looked after the education and welfare of our students in colleges and departments. But this has been a heavy toll on colleagues' spirit and patience. In those circumstances there is a temptation for us to get defensive when we discuss which parts of the University need the biggest share of what we all know are limited resources. I think it will be important as the University weighs up priorities, agrees the White Paper and starts thinking about a new Strategic Plan, that we remember to respect, trust and value the contribution made by all parts of the University.

In the most recent Ipsos Veracity index we are told which professions people most trust. Understandably medical professionals are up in the top five most trusted professions, but do you know who else are in those top spots? Librarians and museum curators. The area of the University that I was glad to learn more about this year was the extraordinary and important work of GLAM (Gardens, Libraries and Museums). GLAM attracts public and popular support to the University through their innovative access work and public engagement, and their showcasing of the research of divisions, as well as through their core role as custodians of the materials of learning and culture. Pragmatically, in the pandemic Oxford's parks and libraries were where students most wanted to be, and the GLAM staff worked very hard to make that possible. And GLAM do more to engage positively with the wider city of Oxford than any other part of the University. It has been an honour to get to know them better and to see their impact.

The Proctors' Office now deals with over 9,000 items of casework a year. Education Policy Support also has a growing workload of complex cases. I have huge respect for the care and detailed attention given by our colleagues in the Proctors' Office, and in EPS, to casework, and the emphasis they place on enabling students to thrive and complete their studies. However, in the challenging circumstances of the pandemic there has been a tendency for students to become dependent on seeking mitigation and extensions, rather than planning adjustments in advance so that they can complete work in time. The cumulative build-up of requests for extensions, mitigation and excusals can add to student stress, and adds to the workload of staff, including exam boards. We hope students can feel more resilient when they face assessments in the coming year. More practically the Proctors have proposed that some mitigation processes should be moved onto eVision. As well as useful streamlining, this will provide a more transparent and complete record of student progress, so that colleges, departments and students themselves can see when additional intervention and support is needed.

As well as low student confidence, open-book exams have led to some drop in the confidence academic staff and examiners have in assessment processes, with concern about student plagiarism and collusion. The cases of plagiarism we have identified have been quite low, although cases of potential poor academic

practice have been higher. We hope that one positive outcome of the past two disrupted years may be that we think more innovatively about how we examine and assess students.

Regarding non-academic conduct, the Proctors have seen, and have heard from college deans, that students have lost some of their usual ways of living courteously and supportively together, both in person and online. Added to this there has been concern about the continued practice of trashing after exams. We appreciate students' hard work and achievement and respect their wish to celebrate, but throwing eggs, flour and confetti on the street as I saw last week is disrespectful to people in the Oxford city community. In the wider global context just now it is worse than disrespectful. We have enjoyed working with the energetic and positive incumbent Student Union officers and with college MCR and JCR presidents this year. We hope that with their leadership and example the student body can renew their customary ties of community and respect for one another and for others beyond the University.

This year I learnt the term 'perseverate' from my Medical Sciences colleagues: the reiterative return again and again to the same topic. In University committees over the past year there has been some perseveration about the challenges we are facing: health and safety, cyber security, loss of research funding, our need for investment in IT for everything we do, the dual tensions of the cost of repairing the parts of the University estate that are decaying and the spiralling costs of new building, the need for competitive academic salaries and pensions, that there is not enough resource to go round. In the many committees on which we have sat as Proctors and Assessor the perseverations are very often about these continuing challenges. As I finish now, I am worried that being positive about the University and its work, as I am, will sound naively optimistic. But I have met hundreds of people this year who give me grounds for optimism, who recognise the challenges Oxford faces, and the need to foster and support the work of staff and students. It has been a privilege to work with you all. I hope that Jane, Linda and Richard, our successors, can be part of conversations in the coming year that will help the University to resolve some of those challenges.

With final thanks: to the egregious Junior Proctor. I couldn't have asked for a better colleague. I pass on to him.

**Junior Proctor:** I am relieved that the Vice-Chancellor has given us leave to speak in English. I thank the Senior Proctor for her words. She spoke them perfectly, in both ancient and more modern forms of the language. Some satirists, always ready to lampoon the University, have asserted that in Oxford, speaking in English is ‘not always so easy’. According to an 1860 edition of *Punch* magazine, ‘One of the provisions of the Oxford University Reform act is that statutes may be made and altered, and that the Congregation may speak in English. Ah! - that is, of course, if they can.’ I can only but try.

Another observation made in the same magazine a decade later is that ‘much has been written about the division of labour’, but that ‘a remarkable instance has just occurred of the accumulation of labour’ where ‘A gentleman has been appointed to the office of pro-proctor in the University of Oxford who is also a master of Arts, in Clerical Orders, a Fellow of His College, and Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trade.’

This reminds me to thank our Pro-Proctors this year, all women, classicists, art historians, and medical scientists, with lineages and histories that represent a fair chunk of the world. Their accumulated labour has made ours so much more manageable and their presence in many of our ceremonies has added to the record of how Oxford has changed, and can continue to do so.

A final reference to *Punch*, reporting in the 1890s on the work of the Oxford statistical society, under the leadership of Professor Sillyphellow. ‘The society has prepared some curious statistical records from a recent survey. In a parish containing 1500 houses, there were no less than 700 children in arms, giving the enormous average of nearly half a baby to each house; of seven hundred and forty-two knockers, there are six hundred and twenty out of reach of a child, eighty-nine want fresh painting, thirty-two are in tolerable repair, and the remaining one had been wrenched off since the Society’s last survey.’ A suggestion perhaps that research was esoteric and that data had little practical application.

Satirists will continue to lampoon the University; and it is good that we can occasionally laugh at ourselves. But when we look at our statistical records today, and particularly when we look at these in relation to our shared priorities as a university and the strategies that we have assembled to achieve them, we have much to celebrate.

In Education, where we are committed to attracting and admitting students from all backgrounds, our undergraduate numbers have grown by 4.6% to over 12,500, and postgraduate numbers have increased by a rate of 8.6% to just over 13,000 between 2019/20 and 2020/1.

And in our drive to make our intakes more diverse, it is pleasing that various initiatives such as Opportunity Oxford have worked well and that we have made rapid progress against nationally defined admissions targets by socio-economic status. And in ensuring that there is equity in outcome (difficult as this concept is), there are good indications, despite little and unstable data, that the outcomes gap is narrowing across groups by sex, race and disability. We look with great anticipation to the launch of Foundation Oxford next term, and to its contribution to our strategic goals.

Graduate access too has benefited from a number of initiatives including UNIQ+ and summer internships for aspiring doctoral students from non-traditional backgrounds, and the Black Academic Futures programme is showing a lot of promise.

In our goal to promote and enable ambitious research, research income has continued to grow and stands at over £650 million underwritten by nearly 8,000 research contracts; and that we continue to innovate can be judged by the fact that we have more than 150 spinout companies and that the social and economic impact from research is distributed across our divisions. To mention but a few: in Medical Sciences, in the development of vaccines to combat COVID-19 and malaria; in Humanities, on ethics in artificial intelligence; in Social Sciences, on childhood poverty and social inequalities; and in Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences, on quantum computing and rapid testing.

Our goal is to attract, recruit and retain people. Oxford is and we know will remain an attractive place to work, and those who do report positively on their experiences. Results from a recent staff survey show that engagement is high. For all that we are able to celebrate, we must be cautious. What we learn from this picture is that our people work hard, and there is perhaps some expectation that their efforts are acknowledged, if not better rewarded.

To attract people, we need to continue to find ways to expand our estate, and to provide more good-quality affordable housing. Our plans in this regard are well advanced, and long-term

financial partnership arrangements offer a promising model to minimise the University’s exposure to risk. But what is built and where, and to whom it should be attractive, is still far from clear.

To retain people, we must ensure that the environments that sustain our work are enabling and encourage innovation and creativity. The University’s response lies in the White Paper, which aims to increase transparency and accountability and through funding settlements to give divisions and departments more control and authority over surplus income. There is no doubt that the White Paper will transform the financial management landscape of the University but we must be cautious that a shift of power through financial decentralisation to divisions does indeed offer incentives to departments and necessary protections of academic freedom.

We must redouble our efforts to look after people too, to ensure their welfare and wellbeing, and to reward them better for their efforts. Again, much is being done even against a backdrop of stretched services, and arguably continuing debates about the fairest ways to support all staff in these economically bleak times. To protect the lifeblood of fresh ideas, we must take better care of our growing numbers of research staff, many of whom are on short-term research contracts and without college memberships. Important work is underway to build and sustain a vibrant research culture and a lot will be expected from departments to mediate the professional growth trajectories of our young researchers.

At the other end of the age spectrum are those who contribute so much to secure our leading position in world university rankings and some are anxious that as they come up to the retirement age, they have more to give. In order to promote intergenerational fairness and equality and diversity in recruitment, the University has since 2011 maintained an Employer Justified Retirement Age policy. This is currently under review.

Two townhall meetings were held this year and it is clear that there are strong feelings about whether the EJRA serves the University’s aims. Rising costs of living and the erosion of pensions, and the potential impact of this on younger generations of academics, as well as the confidence of older academics in their abilities to continue to contribute to the answers we seek to the wicked problems of today’s world, combine to move the debate in one direction or another along a continuum of individual

need and sacrifice for the collective good. Arrangements that work elsewhere are more difficult in Oxford and the EJRA review committee has mined unique data, that if followed will hopefully lead us some way to reducing the tension.

I want to end with a question that may exercise us for some time. We have, it is clear, done much to change Oxford, to align its vision to what we expect from a progressive university in a modern world. But have we done enough to transform it? For some, the answer is ‘more than enough’

while for others, it is ‘not half enough’. And is that perhaps because the question is not a question?

The work of the Race Equalities Task Force has exposed many areas where we can do better, and must, and it is clear that for many, transformation goes beyond a shift in targets to changes in culture. And not just on questions of race – there have this year been many debates about the legitimacy of certain forms of language, on questions of sexual orientation and gender, on sexual violence, and on the

freedom of academics to teach and debate hard questions on religion and nationalism amidst concerns about their personal safety. Expectations about what the University can or should do are high, if divergent, and we have seen the potential for these very difficult questions to test our collegiality. Much has happened this year to test our strength of belief in our fundamental principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech. If there was ever a time for the collegiate University to unite behind these, the pursuit of truth, justice and fairness – it is now.

### Proctorial Year 2021-22

#### Academic appeals

	2020-21					2021-22				
	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	SDP referral	Ongoing	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	SDP referral	Ongoing
<b>Taught</b>	70	14 (1)	56 (2)	n/a	4	95	23 (4)	72	n/a	0
<b>Research</b>	14	0	2	n/a	1	23	0	0	n/a	0

#### Student complaints

	2020-21					2021-22				
	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	SDP referral	Ongoing	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	SDP referral	Ongoing
<b>Taught</b>	14	2 (1)	8 (2)	n/a	4	11	2 (4)	6 (1)	n/a	3
<b>Research</b>	8	1 (1)	5	n/a	2	2	0	0	n/a	1
<b>Other</b>	1	0	1	n/a	0	1	0	1	n/a	0

#### Student academic misconduct

	2020-21					2021-22				
	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	SDP referral	Ongoing	Total	Upheld	Not upheld	SDP referral	Ongoing
<b>Plagiarism</b>	46	29 (7)	16 (3)	1 (1)	14	46	33 (11)	11 (3)	0	2
<b>Open Book</b>	20	0	20	0	0	30	12	18	0	0
<b>Other</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Please note: (i) cases under ‘upheld’ includes those that were upheld in part; (ii) data in brackets are legacy cases carried over from the previous proctorial year.

#### Student non-academic misconduct

##### BREACH OF STATUTE XI: UNIVERSITY CODE OF DISCIPLINE

	Total	
	2020-21	2021-22
Engaging in offensive, violent or threatening behaviour	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
Engaging in any dishonest behaviour in relation to the University	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Breach of IT regulations	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Harassment (non-sexual)	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
Sexual misconduct /harassment	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>