

Gazette Supplement



Oration by the demitting Senior Proctor

Senior Proctor: Insignissima Vice-Cancellaria, licetne anglice loqui?

Vice-Chancellor: Licet.

Vice-Chancellor, Heads of House, present and future Proctors and Assessors, members of Convocation, Congregation and their guests, it falls to me, as the demitting Senior Proctor, to address you not only on my own behalf, but on that of the Junior Proctor, Professor Fabre, and the Assessor, Dr Allan. This ceremony ends another proctorial year which can be described, with some satisfaction, as one of the less eventful since the creation of this office in the early 13th century. The proctors no longer have the power to reduce the costs of living in the city - with results that are plain to all; we no longer have the right, and perhaps not even the youthful vigour, to throw students out of public houses at nine o'clock; and, in spite of our excellent Latin, we can no longer arrest a decree in Congregation by stating *nobis procuratoribus non placet*. The Junior Proctor's refusal to allow a purple suit to be worn as sub fusc in the Sheldonian was the most magisterial exercise of our remaining powers. It cannot be denied that the University's financial and political embarrassments are as heavy as they have been at any time within living memory; ours was the year, however, that fell between Tinbergen and Brexit, and even that sleepless incubus, the question of academic remuneration, has elected not to trouble us and to lie in wait instead for our successors. For this lack of public activity we have endeavoured to make up in our private lives: one of us has been married, and another has become a father - both admittedly for the second time.

Of course the three terms of office, inconveniently spanning two academic years, are no small event in the lives of the Proctors and the Assessor themselves. It is rare indeed to have such an opportunity to inspect the vast arterial system that

oxygenates the most ancient, and perhaps the most heterogeneous, university in the English-speaking world. Contrary to widespread expectation, we have found debate on the numerous committees that we attend to be sharp yet courteous, bold yet well informed, and while the pace of decision is slow, one has a sense of participation in a fruitful exercise which is all too often lacking at the level of a faculty or division. Just as we have reason to be grateful to the staff who prepare those committees as well as the students, administrators and academics who sit on them, so we have special reason to be grateful to the bedels who have enabled us to sustain the ceremonial side of the University's business, which is the special preserve of the Junior and Senior Proctors and an inexhaustible source of misadventures. However often we have mispronounced the names of those who were supplicating for degrees, we have never lacked an up-to-date sheet to read them from; however inopportunistly we have doffed or refrained from doffing, our caps have always been ready for us, together with our ponderous robes and hoods. For this we have to thank Caroline Barnes, Dave Homer, Gary Jones, Dave Paintin, Alan Slater and Dave and Pat Yeatman. We are also very grateful to the Pro-Proctors - Andrew Moore, Philip Kennedy, Louise Durning and Elizabeth Macfarlane - who have ably stood in when one or both of the Proctors could not be present. Every ceremony for the conferral of degrees is superintended by the Vice-Chancellor or by one of her Pro-Vice-Chancellors; on this occasion it falls to us to note with sadness the death of Sir Roger Ainsworth, who presided gracefully for many years not only in the Sheldonian Theatre, but also at numerous University sermons, performing his duties with ease and urbanity up to the middle of the present term.

We perform the rest of our duties in the University Offices, and for our own office staff this has been a year of increasing burdens and straitened resources. We were sad to lose our witty and ebullient Clerk to the Proctors, Douglas Thornton, but his interim successor Rachel Dearlove and his permanent successor Alison Sealey have impressed us by their extraordinary capacity for work as well as by their vigilance and their alacrity in the mastering of new skills. Esther Villiers and Stephen Hearn have presented us with full and insightful briefs, Caroline Barnes has always been ahead of us in the management of our well-populated calendar, while Jonathan Gordon, Theo Papaioannou and Clare Brennan have managed loads that would once have been deemed impossible. We also owe a great debt to Maria Bindasova, Amanda Tattersall and our newest recruit, Sarah Ashley. If those who have applied to the Proctors' Office have not always been content with the speed of response, the cause is not to be sought in the inefficiency or tardiness of those to whom the tasks have been confided, but in the annual multiplication of both the number and the variety of the tasks.

We cannot include among these tasks the business of Congregation, which, notwithstanding the omnipresent murmurs of discontent, appears to have fallen back into its customary state of resigned indifference. On two occasions the University Council attempted to foster debates in the absence of any resolution from another quarter, first on the state of the pension fund and then on Council's recommendation of the Strategic Plan for the University. One can only be disappointed that the most audible reaction was a charge that, by holding a vote when none was required, Council was once again subverting democracy; but if we still believe in democracy after Brexit, we are surely aware that it cannot

flourish except where the majority of the community have a strong sense of their common needs, their mutual dependence and above all of their mutual obligations. When Oxford University was a community of friars and their students, in perpetual danger of murder by the townsfolk, a strong awareness of this interdependence must already have prevailed. It must have continued into more recent times, when students and tutors were almost of a piece in their social origins, intellectual interests and material ambitions, and even the ancillary staff in colleges were treated with familial condescension. Today, fortunately, the University admits students from almost every country, speaking different native tongues and exhibiting some diversity of economic background; today our administrators are professionals, sometimes combining rigorous training in their own occupation with higher academic qualifications than were necessary for holding a tutorship 50 years ago. We can no longer take it for granted that we are 'One Oxford', and that is why the aspiration to be One Oxford again has been given pride of place in the strategic plan.

The jurisdiction of the Proctors now embraces a body of over 20,000 students. Most of their dealings with individual members of this body fall at either end of the process of examination. Applications to be examined under special arrangements have increased in a single year by 50%, the chief cause being not physical impairment but anxiety. And then, once the examinations are over, the Junior and Senior Proctors have to meet with various personages who rightly want to know why the mere fact of having completed a degree should entitle students to block whole streets in Oxford for a month, with enormous inconvenience to traffic and neighbouring colleges, and an inordinate waste of money (which they allegedly do not have) on the purchase of alcohol with no object but to ruin expensive clothes.

It is easy to mock these bacchantes, and to ask them how the mere exertion of sitting a three-hour examination compares with the hectic monotony of serving at a supermarket checkout. It is easy to ask where all the anxiety comes from, when almost every graduate from Oxford receives a First or an Upper Second; and we can point out that if the class of one's degree were of such consequence, one ought to refrain from celebration until the results appear. And if the students are simply happy to leave, we may argue, why did they come at the expense of other worthy candidates who passionately desired a place at Oxford? All this we can say, but since we have perhaps

the most industrious and conscientious body of students that Oxford has ever seen, we have reason to suspect that their anxiety and the excesses by which they relieve it have some reason, and that reason may be a feeling that they are not at home in this institution, as students of previous generations were.

They pass through their studies encumbered by debts that were previously defrayed either by one's family or by the government. They anticipate a future that is uncertain even for those who have obtained good degrees at distinguished universities. While they are here, at least in the humanities, they encounter a mode of education heavily based on books, although we know that the habit of reading, either at school or in hours of leisure, diminishes year by year. Even the prospect of writing eight examination papers by hand may be formidable to a student whose essays hitherto have always been prepared on a computer. It is not, of course, desirable that Oxford should cease to inculcate and reward curiosity, accuracy, originality and rigour of thought, but it may henceforth be necessary to cultivate these virtues by means more tempered to the experience of our students. It may also be necessary to ask whether those of us who teach are always showing that consciousness of the claims of others which we expect of our junior members. Do we in fact believe that we are members of one Oxford, or does Oxford exist for the academics alone?

To explain this question, let us begin by granting the notorious fact that academics in Oxford today are on the whole not so well paid as they would have been 100 years ago. If this is true of lecturers in their 50s with permanent and full-time contracts, it is all the more true of those who are 20 years younger and true a fortiori of the growing army of those who teach from year to year, or even from term to term, with no time to produce the publications which might further their careers. In these circumstances, all may have reason to feel aggrieved, but equity surely demands that those who are better remunerated ought to think first of those who earn much less while working equally hard and with much less reason for confidence in the future. A sense of justice will also restrain us from holding forth incessantly on the hardships of our profession in the presence of administrators who earn much less but are forced to live in the same expensive city. It will also be salutary to remember that this city is home not only to us academics but to 100,000 people who already resent the cost and inconvenience of over-population. The

rapid expansion of the student body to which the strategic plan commits us is regarded with understandable wariness by the City Council; it is not regarded with any more pleasure by students, junior academics and administrators who foresee that its first effect will be to aggravate the scarcity of housing. Their fears will not be allayed when they sit on committees which suggest that the financial difficulties of the University (meaning, of course, the academics) can be mitigated by a rise in fees.

Such myopia is by no means ubiquitous; there is indeed a widespread consciousness of the burdens under which our students labour. There is also much impatience with the obstacles that lie in the way of ameliorating the lot of both students and junior academics. We all deplore the frequency with which colleges find themselves bidding against each other, or against the University, for the same area of land; our inability to draft a statute which would equalise the benefits that colleges confer on their students and tutors now excites much indignation, and not only at poorer colleges. We can at least celebrate the introduction of more generous provision for paternity and maternity leave at the prompting of the Assessor. At the same time, the countervailing tendency to see Oxford as no more than a place where academics come to make careers is growing stronger, and it is always underpinned by the supposed imperative to maintain our pre-eminence in the world. Because of this, we are told, we must have more students to assist us with our research, and the consequences must simply be borne by those who do not enjoy the emoluments of this research. Now, of course it is very hard to relinquish a status once one has attained it; nevertheless, it is simply a logical platitude that pre-eminence cannot be the essential trait of a university, since universities can survive for centuries without possessing it. It is only in fantastic dreams, as a mathematician from Christ Church pointed out, that all can win and all have prizes. The founders of Oxford, who also understood Latin, believed the essence of a university to be expressed by the first two syllables of the word, which connote both unity and wholeness - a wholeness of knowledge, a unity of purpose, which leaves no place for emulation, partiality or the subordination of the common good to piecemeal gains.

Proctorial Year 2018-19

Summary of Complaints

The previous proctorial year's figures have, where directly comparable, been included (in brackets).

During 2018-19, the Proctors investigated 86 (76) complaints and academic appeals, including 4 legacy cases from 2017-18. Of these 86 cases, 7 were upheld in whole or in part; 18 academic appeals are outstanding.

The great majority of cases were academic appeals against decisions of the examiners (both taught-degree and research examinations) - 66.

Taught-course appeals: 62 (54); 8 of these cases were upheld in full or in part.

Research student appeals: 4 (8); 1 of these cases was upheld in full or in part.

Taught-course complaints: 9; discrimination: 3 (1); maladministration: 4 (2). Industrial action: 2 (1); 2 of these cases were upheld in full or in part.

Research student complaints: teaching and supervision: 3 (4); these cases are ongoing.

Summary of Disciplinary Cases**BREACH OF STATUTE XI CODE OF DISCIPLINE**

Engaging in offensive, violent or threatening behaviour: 3 (1)

Engaging in action which is likely to cause injury or to impair safety: 1 (0)

Possession of drugs: 1 (0)

Breach of IT regs: 2 (0)

Non-sexual harassment: 2 (3)

Sexual harassment: 6 (3)

BREACHES OF THE PROCTORS' DISCIPLINARY REGULATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS

Academic misconduct (plagiarism): 75 (53); of these cases, 11 resulted in no further action, 10 were referred back to the examiners, 35 were referred to the Academic Conduct Panel and 1 to the Student Disciplinary Panel. 18 are ongoing.

Academic misconduct (other than plagiarism): 1 (4); no further action.

