

# Gazette Supplement



## Report of proceedings in Congregation, 7 June 2011 Debate on a resolution

The report of the debate in Congregation on 7 June on the resolution instructing Council to communicate to government that the University of Oxford has no confidence in the policies of the Minister for Higher Education is set out below (see *Gazette* No. 4955, 2 June 2011, p. 673).

At the close of the debate, the resolution was approved on a division [*for*: 283; *against*: 5].

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: The business before Congregation is declaration of approval of a legislative proposal and a resolution, and voting on a resolution instructing Council to communicate to government that the University of Oxford has no confidence in the policies of the Minister for Higher Education. Will you please be seated? Since no opposition has been notified to the legislative proposal concerning changes to Statute XI or to the resolution authorising the use of space at the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, I declare these carried. The resolution which comprises the main business of today's meeting was placed on the agenda of this meeting in the University, first published on 19 May.

Before outlining the procedural details of the debate, I wanted to report to you something of Council's thoughts at its regular meeting last week, ahead of this afternoon's proceedings. In the course of those discussions, it was clearly recognised that the resolution reflected a significant degree of concern in the University community to which this debate would give a further and fuller airing. In the light of that concern, Council agreed that there should be a ballot at the end of the debate,

notwithstanding the fact that under Congregation Regulations a vote is not mandatory if, as in current circumstances, there has been no notice of opposition or amendment. In line with Council's decision, therefore, the proceedings today will conclude with a ballot on the resolution and the results will be published with the transcript of the debate.

The procedure for today's meeting will be as follows. I shall begin by asking the Registrar to read the resolution. I shall then invite Professor Robert Gildea to move the resolution and Dr Karma Nabulsi to second it. The mover of the resolution has been asked to speak for no more than eight minutes and the seconder to speak for no more than five minutes. After that, the debate on the resolution will be open to the House. I would ask all speakers to come forward and to speak into the microphone, first giving their name and college or department. Speakers from the floor of the House should please follow the usual convention of not speaking for more than five minutes. May I draw the attention of speakers to the device positioned on the side of the lectern. This anti-loquitor device has green, amber and red lights to help speakers with the timing of their speeches. The amber light shows with one minute remaining and should encourage speakers to start to wind up their remarks. Red means speakers are out of time and must conclude their remarks. A number of members of Congregation have indicated a wish to speak and I will endeavour to call them all, but I cannot guarantee that I will be able to do so. Priority will be given to those who have indicated in advance that they wish to speak, and I would ask that additional speakers come forward to speak only if they have new points to add

which have not already been raised by other speakers. In accordance with health and safety guidelines the stenographer who is helping us to transcribe today's proceedings is entitled to a break after an hour and a half, therefore if speeches are still being made at 3.30 p.m. and no vote has been taken by then, I shall call for a five-minute break. I would be grateful if any speaker who uses a written text would afterwards provide a copy of that text to Mrs Benton, the officer who is collecting such speeches, as this will be of assistance in preparing the published record of the debate which will appear in a *Gazette* supplement as soon as possible, I hope in the issue published on 16 June, but it will also be available on the University website.

At the end of the debate, I shall give Professor Gildea a right of reply to the debate. I shall then take a division on the resolution. This will be by written ballot for which members of Congregation should have received voting papers as they entered the theatre. Any members who have not will have an opportunity to collect a paper at the exits as they leave. Under Congregation Regulations 2 of 2002, a vote can only be taken at the close of the debate and I regret that any members unable to stay until I call the vote on the resolution will, therefore, not have an opportunity to register a vote. I should stress that this means that a member may not leave a completed voting paper with another member. The Proctors, Pro-Proctors and Bedels who will be collecting the papers at the close of the debate will accept only each member's single personal voting paper. I shall explain the detailed voting arrangements when the vote is taken. I now ask the Registrar to read the resolution.

THE REGISTRAR: The following is the text of the resolution:

'Congregation instructs Council to communicate to government that the University of Oxford has no confidence in the policies of the Minister for Higher Education.'

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I now call on Professor Robert Gildea to move the resolution.

**Professor Robert Gildea, Faculty of History, Worcester College**

I would like to formally move the resolution that you have just heard. This is a very weighty business, a step of historic importance, and not a course of action that Congregation is undertaking lightly. A particular minister is named in the resolution, and some colleagues may be unhappy with this. The minister is a member of the coalition government and the higher education policies we are opposing are the work of the government as a whole, but this minister has been central to promoting these policies, he has been outspoken in defending them and he is responsible for delivering them. That is why, in this unprecedented way, we are calling him to account.

The future of higher education as we have known it since the Second World War is under threat. By this, I mean a system based on three principles: one, higher education as a public good, paid for out of general taxation; two, academic scholarship pursued in the spirit of enquiry and not to meet political or economic agendas; and three, access to teaching and learning at university on the basis of intellectual potential. This system, I should add, is also a cost-effective, highly professional and a student-centred way to prepare young people for employment, research and for life in general. The principles and delivery of this system of higher education are now under attack from government policies which are reckless, incoherent and incompetent. First of all, they are reckless: an ideologically driven marketisation of education which, as we have heard again today, is financially incompetent and will save no money for the Treasury or the taxpayer; on the contrary. By massively cutting the arts and humanities teaching budget, the government is forcing universities to triple tuition fees. It is crippling students with debt, or driving them away from higher education for fear of debt. It is threatening with closure

courses in universities which will not be able to recruit students at top rates or which will fall victim to further rounds of government cuts. It is opening the way to private for-profit providers of higher education who are already prowling at the gates. Second, government policies are incoherent, because they promise to increase social mobility while doing everything possible in terms of regressive economic, social and fiscal policies to increase social inequality. The story of off-quota university places and the announcement of a niche College for the Humanities at £18,000 per year heralds the arrival of twin-track university admissions: a red-carpet entry for the rich and even more intense competition for everyone else. Students who already fear that the odds of getting into top universities are stacked against them will simply not apply and we will be back to Brideshead. Meanwhile, the government passes the buck of plans to widen access and increase social mobility to the universities to deal with and threatens to penalise them if they fail. Less a buck, Vice-Chancellor, than a poisoned chalice. Third, the incompetence and incoherence of these policies is exposed on a weekly basis, sending the government PR machine into overdrive. It resorts to attempts to disguise these destructive policies which would be laughable if so much were not at stake. There is the 'calm down, dear' approach for debt-averse prospective students and their families, saying that they will only pay back loans at £50 per month and not if their salary drops. There are the fairy tales, such as that off-quota places for the rich will actually increase social mobility, by leaving more 'real' places for the poorest families. There is the nonsense, such as claiming that the main obstacle to social mobility is feminism.

For these reasons, I am proposing the resolution of no confidence in the minister with responsibility for universities. One final point. The resolution before you engages the name of the University of Oxford. It has been signed by 170 members of Congregation and has the firm support of OUSU and the wider student body. I ask members of Congregation to give resounding support to the motion in order to make our concerns heard in the strongest terms. Congregation is a unique space which allows academics to debate major issues of concern to the University. We have a duty to use this privilege on behalf of our own students, on behalf of colleagues and students at

other universities who do not have the same fora or the same freedoms as we do to speak out, and on behalf of hundreds of thousands of prospective students and their families who are seeing the prospects of a university education shrivel before them. I will now leave the floor to the eloquence of my colleagues. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call on Dr Karma Nabulsi to second the resolution.

**Dr Karma Nabulsi, Department of Politics and International Relations, St Edmund Hall**

I would like to second the motion 'Congregation instructs Council to communicate to the government that the University of Oxford has no confidence in the policies of the Minister for Higher Education.' In second week's Discussion, I raised the issue of how divisive the government's higher education policies will be on so many levels of public life. Citizens across the country are being asked to abandon a common vision for the direction of the country. These artificially created hierarchies and conflicts generate damaging divisions in all manner of ways, and the speakers to follow will touch upon many of them. Of course, as any of us who are members of a college governing body, department or university committee will be aware, our colleagues can hold very different views to our own, so not all of you will share every idea you hear today in favour of the motion. But what we do share is what brings us together in putting this motion before you: a common attachment to the purpose of higher education which is now under grave threat. So in seconding this motion, I would simply like to draw your attention to the many ideas we have in common, the important things that bring us together. In doing so, I aim to show that voting for this motion is the most unifying, positive and professional gesture we can make as members of this great university; for ourselves, the students, the staff and administration here and, more broadly, for the young people and other academics across the country. What do we stand for? Oxford is committed, above all, to the pursuit of academic excellence in all its forms; to the defence of academic disciplines, without undue regard for their 'market' value; and to the ideal of education as a comprehensive, publicly funded activity, accessible to the widest number of young people. These are not just good things in themselves; they are also essential instruments for sustaining a well-ordered society, one in which the

individuals think for themselves, but also think of themselves as members of a political community and, ultimately, share a common understanding of what it means to be a citizen. These are the values we believe in and pass on to our students, and it is this vision which is now threatened by the policies of the current government. A vote for this motion is not a negative statement, it is an affirmation of who we are and the traditions we wish to preserve. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: The debate on the resolution is now open to the House. Please could speakers come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving their name and college or department. I now call on Professor Howard Hotson.

**Professor Howard Hotson, Faculty of History, St Anne's College**

At the heart of current higher education policy is a now familiar notion—allegedly grounded in economic science—the notion that the introduction of market forces in the university sector will simultaneously drive up standards, drive down prices, maximise student choice and save taxpayers money. But evidence is accumulating on an almost daily basis that precisely the opposite is happening. The new funding arrangements won't save money in the short term. Just this morning, the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons warned that a £100-million-a-year gap is opening up between ministers' optimistic estimates and the actual cost of this new funding system. Private sector institutions will not drive up standards. During the past few weeks, we have also learned the leading for-profit university in the US, the sister institution of our own BPP, has been forced by the US Supreme Court to repay \$300 million for knowingly and recklessly misleading investors in 2004 and is being investigated by ten US states for a pattern of deceptive practices in student recruiting and financing dating back to 2002. Market competition will not maximise student choice either, as London Metropolitan University has graphically demonstrated in recent weeks. Forced to protect its profitable courses from private sector competition, London Met has decided to jettison seventy per cent of its courses from 2012, and the potential for similar collateral damage elsewhere in the university sector is enormous. Competition for the narrow range of courses which will survive this process, particularly at the lower levels of the university system, will offer poor value

for money to students and to taxpayers alike. As the range of courses available at the lower end of the university system shrinks, the employment market will be flooded with graduates in a narrow range of vocational subjects. The resulting competition for jobs will push down the earning prospects, especially for those educated at the least reputable and well-established institutions. Since unemployed, underemployed or poorly paid graduates will be unable to pay their student loans, the taxpayer will have to step in to pick up the tab. This is precisely what has happened in the US, where the default rate on federal student loans is four times higher amongst former students at for-profit universities than amongst those from traditional universities.

The cheaper the degrees, it appears, the higher the ultimate bill to the taxpayer, not the other way around. But these reforms do not merely fail the economic tests dearest to policy makers. Even worse, it will drive down academic, intellectual and cultural standards as well. This effect is virtually implicit in this very idea of marketised higher education; after all, the best way to drive prices down and profits up is to drive out of your business everything you can't put a price tag on, and no one can put a price tag on what a well-rounded education contributes to the life of the individual and of society at large, because most of the value it produces is not monetary, but intellectual, cultural, ethical and political. So any higher education system deliberately subjected to economic markets in this way will have most of the non-monetary value squeezed out of it: the very soul of the arts and humanities, which do not deliver a fixed return on investments; blue skies research in the sciences, which can't reliably forecast a short-term economic payback; the freedom of students and teachers to pursue advanced thought, wherever it leads; and, above all, the opportunity to nurture young minds at the most impressionable stage in their intellectual development, within a unique environment in which young people can interact with their elders, neither as fee-paying customers demanding better services for money, nor as trainees in the national project of wealth creation, but as fellow human beings whose minds still need to be opened to the big, unavoidable, perennially fascinating and ultimately important questions. A well-rounded university education of the traditional kind is something of inestimable value,

but most of that value is not monetary. So whenever monetary value is made the principal criterion for governing higher education, the inevitable consequence will be to impoverish all the other values needed for a healthy culture, society and indeed civilisation. That is why current government policy is so perverse. It seeks, radically, to re-engineer England's great university system in order to inject precisely the market forces that ought to be kept at bay. Such fundamental misconceptions inspire no confidence whatsoever. I therefore urge you to support the motion. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Colin Thompson.

**Dr Colin Thompson, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, St Catherine's College**

I have no interest in political grandstanding or personalised attacks. We are not here to bask in the warm glow of rhetoric, so that flagging spirits may be revived: we are here to address the government on issues which are our very *raison d'être*, in the hope that it will listen. It is surely essential that, given the resolution before us, we have something positive to say about where we do place our confidence. For a good twenty years, governments have failed to articulate a clear purpose for higher education. When they have spoken—Conservative, Labour or coalition—they have treated it as an investment which expects short-term benefits for the economy, or as a commodity to be treated for personal gain. I certainly did not enter higher education in order to enhance my salary, or to prove how my impact was to be measured and I do not think I was, or am, alone in that. The investment taxpayers made, complemented here by the private resources garnered over centuries by the colleges and University, was intended to prepare young people for a lifetime of service to society, in whatever area their gifts might best be used. So this House must speak up for the principles which animate our belief in higher education as a partnership and a public good. If I support the resolution, it is for three reasons: it gives this House an opportunity to state clearly and unequivocally what it believes an Oxford education means; because if we do not grasp the opportunity we shall have been silent when we should have spoken; and because the collective voice of academic colleagues in so many sister institutions has been silenced. If the resolution passes, I ask that Council



append a transcript of the debate in its communication to government. I hope it is not too much to ask of those responsible for the sector to give careful thought to the views of a body whose current members embody thousands of years of relevant experience.

Our educational principle may be rooted in centuries of accumulated wisdom, but is always open to developments which enhance it. Teaching is a dialogue, not a monologue—a partnership in which those further along the road guide those nearer the beginning and may in time overtake them, and be overtaken by them. Those who teach listen and learn from their pupils. The partnership is founded on a shared intellectual curiosity. It challenges us to master for ourselves the fundamentals of our discipline rather than simply learning techniques without understanding how they work; it encourages us all to take charge of our thoughts and to develop critical and analytical tools which can be applied to many spheres of life. It is from such partnership and principles that such creative energies emerge and thrive. Society needs people who are prepared to ask the awkward questions and challenge received ideas, or it stagnates. Economic results will follow, but not in a prescribed timescale or in any easily measurable way; but the long-term benefits in terms of contributions to the public good are incalculable.

The loss of public funding for the teaching of the arts and social studies is the logical conclusion of the flawed premises of the short-term economic model successive governments have espoused. Governments should take a long hard look at the contribution such graduates have made, in their professions and as citizens, before they do further damage. Strange that a government which makes so much of the Big Society should seek to encourage future students into higher education with a consumerist ideology which turns it into a private economic transaction between provider and client. This process—let a recent Proctor prophesy—can only lead to a growth in the culture of complaints and litigation, and a consequent loss of the relationship of trust between teachers and learners, which is a necessary precondition for a humane and enlightened education.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Susan Cooper.

**Professor Susan Cooper, Department of Physics, St Catherine's College**

I never know what the morning newscast will bring, but I can reassure you that my recent experience on Council gives me confidence that at least Oxford isn't going to latch on to any hare-brained schemes. The battle is not within, but without. Saying no to the government's bad proposals is best accompanied by trying to devise something better. With some trepidation, I attempt this within the thankfully brief scope of five minutes. My aim can't be restricted merely to higher education policies, as their haste, if not their details, certainly arises from the banking crisis. I need the experts to decide how regulation of the banks should be improved, but I do not hesitate to say: it must be done. Given the financial crisis, some combination of cuts and increased taxation was inevitable. I would rather pay more taxes than see the level of decimation across the public services, but too much taxation might suppress economic recovery, just as unemployment caused by public sector cuts may. There is a limit to how many sectors can be protected from cuts and the solution found for higher education, while painful, is less bad for students than cuts to the quality of their education. The solution is really a delayed income tax, which may even be economically clever. The suddenness and severity of the increase in fees may have been necessitated by the suddenness and severity of the financial crisis: the government should give us numbers on the expected savings, if any, so we can judge. Instead, we get calls for further quick fixes. Five years of trying to improve the finances of a deficit department have taught me the importance of staying calm. Some things first get worse and then improve. If you turn and panic at every storm, you will only get dizzy and fall over, squashing things that would have been good. I would not have recommended a second experiment at introducing variable fees by raising the cap to £9,000, but we should either do the experiment or not, and a market in fees will need at least a few years to reach equilibrium, given its once-a-year timescale. Issuing threats after only a few months spoils the experiment, as universities rush to £9,000 in anticipation of further cuts. If the government really thinks it needs to abort the experiment, it should have reacted decisively by reducing the cap. But the difference between £7,500

and £9,000 is not a financial disaster on the scale of the banking crisis and, having embarked on the experiment, I would rather see it through. A true variety in university missions and costs might develop if the government stops pushing all to do everything. 'Impact' should be removed as a requirement in grant applications and from the REF. It should be judged and rewarded separately, allowing some to shine in that area, perhaps developing applications of research done elsewhere.

Where the new policy is simply illogical, like removing the extra HEFCE funding for band C subjects, it should be reversed. The cost of this, and of restoring the AHRC funding, wouldn't be much; it would even make financial sense in our post-industrial economy. But the worst feature of government higher education policy is the rhetoric. Did the authors of the Browne report really believe it, or just think their audience wanted to hear higher education described as a commodity students would buy for its economic payback? When they spend their own money on a concert or a play, I doubt they are doing it for economic gain rather than its contribution to their quality of life. Despite the bad rhetoric, the new system does allow a student to study English literature or physics for the love of a subject that will enrich their lives, whether or not they earn a fortune from it. If they don't, they will only pay part of the cost, and the government will subsidise the rest. Prospective MBA students may particularly value the key statistic of average graduate earnings. Those with a passion to study English will not choose their university on that basis, but they might find a very low average at a particular university a useful warning that something might be wrong there. It is not the information itself that is harmful, but the words it comes with. We should replace those words. Examples of the range of careers pursued by graduates from each subject may encourage more to dare to follow their passion and, incidentally, show the limited meaning of an average salary. I share the government's desire to get out of the student quota business. Empowering students to choose their subject and university is, in principle, an attractive way. The problem is how to do it without creating chaos. I don't have the answer, but maybe if we all put our minds to it, we can find a way. My message to the government, using the Prime Minister's own words, is 'calm down, dear' and let's talk about it. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Rowan Tomlinson.

**Dr Rowan Tomlinson, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, New College**

I have worked my way through quite a few of the minister's speeches lately and I have been struck by a characteristic they share: a tendency to lean on—and extensively quote—other people's words. The written equivalent perhaps of a trait the minister showed as an undergraduate, when he was apparently too readily influenced by whosoever he last talked to, and a habit all too visible in the rather more consequential texts the minister is now putting his name to. His recent Ron Dearing lecture, for example, name-checks and quotes from authors of reports on higher education like an undergraduate keen to demonstrate just how many of the items on the reading list he has got through. Regrettably, however, the minister seems to get stuck at the stage of the literature review without proceeding to a coherent argument of his own. The result is a cutting and pasting of ideas and policies, past and present; a bit of the Browne review here—when Browne himself, whatever we might think of his market vision of education, said his recommendations were not to be cherry-picked—some ideas from Robbins or Franks there, a generous smattering of neo-liberal politics, not to mention, to keep the political ragbag that is this government together, a nod to his coalition partners in the shape of a repeatedly stated yet patently empty commitment to social mobility, entirely at odds with the government's devastating restructuring of the HE funding regime.

This pick-and-mix approach is born of the contingency of coalition politics. It is producing policies that nobody voted for, as neither party now in government had made them part of its manifesto. It is being imposed with a haste that cannot be justified by the state of public finances, however much the government tells us this is so, and it can be summed up by a handy alliterative doublet: ineptitude and incoherence. Moreover, the minister is not good at submitting his work on time. The white paper was promised back in March, then the deadline was moved to June, and yet here we are, still waiting. Some might ask why we are moving this motion before we have seen the white paper. We answer: because the white paper will deal with the details, when our concern is the fundamentals; because the

government did not wait for its own white paper before enforcing a 100-per-cent cut in funding for humanities and social sciences, and a tripling in fees; and because the repeated gaffes are evidence enough of shoddy policy-cobbling. It seems to me to be urgent to act before we are hit by whatever catastrophic proposals fall from that worryingly cloudy blue sky into this much-anticipated paper. Meanwhile, what excuse is the minister giving us for his work being so late? Supposedly, he is delaying because he wants to see how the price-setting he has enforced is working. Of course, what he and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills are discovering is that it is not working at all. Consequently, their recent interventions bristle with threats, warning us that we set the fee at £9,000 at our peril. 'If graduate contributions end up higher than £7,500,' the minister writes, 'we would reluctantly be forced to find savings from elsewhere in HE.' But our minister's most recent speech is not only filled with the language of the market and with menaces. Like an undergraduate rushing to pad out a last-minute essay, he turns to the glib power of uncontextualised quotation and tosses in a literary reference. 'You are not being left alone on Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* with only the "long, withdrawing roar" of public financial support,' he soothes. Now, the minister read PPE and so perhaps his acquaintance with Arnold was limited to educational and theoretical writings. He certainly does not appear to have considered what resonance the ending of this famous poem might have for those of us left dealing with the disarray of his policies. I quote:

'And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle  
and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.'

I have focused in this speech on the minister, but none of this is really about David Willetts, whose style and method could be aped by any of the tens of ministers-in-waiting armed with business-led presentational training. It is about the policies he has been delivering for the last year and trailing for the last month or so. Our message to the minister, his bosses in government and the ministers-in-waiting has to be not just to think harder, but to think again. So I urge you to vote for this motion and, by so doing, express our utter dismay that we and future generations have been left by this government on such a darkling plain. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Donald Fraser.

**Professor Donald Fraser, Department of Earth Sciences, Worcester College**

After that, it would be difficult to express confidence in the minister, so what are we going to do? There are somewhere between 133 and 164 universities in the UK. It is difficult to find the number in the BIS website, and UUK and HESA seem to use different metrics. So, like any good researcher, we have to define our terms and look for source data. In 2008/09, there were 164 HEIs receiving recurrent teaching grants from HEFCE in the whole of the UK. These all compete, including with Oxford, for money for teaching. In the same year, there were 145 HEIs receiving recurrent research grants from HEFCE. How many universities, let alone research universities, does the minister seriously think the UK can support? Let us do the work for him. Take physics, for example, or chemistry: how many world-class departments do you think there are in the United States? We can use bibliometrics, if you like: fifteen? Let us use a larger number: twenty? Let us index that for the population ratio; that suggests we might support four world-class departments of physics or chemistry in the whole of the UK. If we adjust that for the GDP-per-head ratio, the number is smaller.

What is sure is that the UK cannot support 145—or 164—universities, each with a vice-chancellor, pro-vice-chancellors and so on. Let us take a different example. University College Birmingham attracts no research recurrent grant, but it gets the largest amount of teaching grant among the non-research universities in England. If we go to the University College Birmingham website, we find out that it offers, and I quote, 'Weekend top-up courses, an alternative way to gain a BA (Hons) top up, in one year, part-time; short courses, courses that are between six and fourteen weeks in length, are offered in cake decoration, sugar flowers, and wines and spirits appreciation.' I know some students who do this without a degree or a student loan. This contributes to our skills base, but it is not what a university should be doing. Mr Willetts and his predecessors say they believe in market choices, but is he confident that the market choices of seventeen year olds comparing six-week university courses with full degree level courses in physics, engineering, history or economics are the best way of planning the skills needs of the nation? The admissions policies of his department,

too, are in disarray. Within a few hours we went from a numbers quota with capped fees, to allowing parents to buy places outside the quota for their children by paying more, to suggesting that this was a misunderstanding and such extra payments could come from companies—and I will say nothing about pipers and tunes—to advice to apply late for university entrance in the hope that a lastminute-university.com will develop. We were told that Mr Willetts saved our research base hours before the CSR last autumn. It could have been a disaster, but the Council for Science and Technology stepped in, as did the Royal Society and the British Academy in their submissions to Professor Smith in BIS. This was not a Cruyff Turn; this was a U-turn. But full credit to Mr Willetts; when a policy is wrong, a U-turn is the correct solution and he supported it.

Vice-Chancellor, similarly, the minister's teaching policies are not only confused, they are ill focused and fundamentally wrong on detail. He is failing the mission of his own department. The elephant in the room, if I can push a metaphor for a moment, is the tail. It is the tail of a hundred so-called universities with highly paid vice-chancellors, pro-vice-chancellors and their less highly paid staff, offering university degree courses that are based on skills training. Skills training is important, enabling and not necessarily low grade. Schrödinger, before he arrived in Oxford in 1933—where he became a Fellow of Magdalen and received the Nobel Prize for Physics a month later—had taught for two semesters at a technical college. Okay, I have worked in Germany, I know the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart has an excellent pedigree, but we need technical colleges in this country too, not a long tail of failing, poorly focused, so-called universities. Universities are not just about skills training. Vice-Chancellor, the minister needs again to show leadership and grasp the nettle, if not the tail. We need to move forward and return to pre-1992. The UK has no need for and cannot afford 164 universities. What it does need are forty or fifty well-funded universities and a hundred or more polytechnics and technical colleges that provide a different product. It is time to stop devaluing the UK's excellent university brand. Let us turn a hundred universities back into polytechnics and technical colleges. Oxford and other universities could easily work with such colleges by admitting transfers of the best students each year, as Caltech did when I was there, thus

genuinely contributing to social mobility. Let us save money by rationalisation, paring overheads, including those for student loans, so as to offer the simple admission product that is needed: free no-fees admission to all HEIs for all qualified home and EC students. This is not rocket science, it is not new, it is not even banking, but it will pay great dividends for the nation.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Paul Coones.

### **Dr Paul Coones, School of Geography, Hertford College**

Having spoken in the Congregation Discussion last month, I hesitate to present myself once again. There is always the danger of first time: tragedy, and second time: farce. But there are times in life when one is obliged to respond to the exhortation: don't just do something, stand there. I have to be brief with, at my back, time's wingèd chariot, controlled this afternoon by a set of traffic lights, but, after all, to quote the Apostles' Creed out of context, there are only two kinds of famous academic: the quick and the dead. My remarks stem from three initial observations. First, there is no Minister for Higher Education, as the resolution states: Mr Willetts is the Minister of State for Universities and Science. Secondly, I wish to concentrate, as does the resolution, on the politics, the policies, not upon the minister personally. Thirdly, here we are again giving a response. We always seem to be responding, justifying, defending ourselves, the University of Oxford, rather than being proactive, setting the agenda and leading as far as we are able so to do.

I offer three points. My first is suggested by the magnificent defence of civilised values set out by Professor Sir Andrew Motion in this year's Romanes lecture, 'The bonfire of the humanities: why the humanities matter', delivered in this theatre last Thursday. No wonder, Mr Vice-Chancellor, while listening intently to Sir Andrew's address, you nodded in approval so frequently that you made the eminently practical decision, as the lecture went on, to remove your square. Such a highly articulate, beautifully spoken and compelling case for the humanities could hardly be bettered, and Sir Andrew included some autobiographical reflections. I do not in general enjoy talking about myself, but it's a very dull man who allows his principles to enslave him, so perhaps you will indulge me in my second point. The debate about the universities is helpfully considered in relation to

other government policies, notably those relating to the National Health Service and the public libraries. The subject of the NHS is, quite rightly, so prominent in the national consciousness that I can only agree with the doctors and nurses that whatever modifications are required by changing times and shifting demographics, its public nature simply must be retained, free at the point of delivery. I do not want choice, Mr Cameron, I want a good local hospital. I want the treatment of patients, not a culture of targets. I want health care, not opportunities for profit, and I am emphatically not a customer, Mr Lansley. Finally, on a personal note, if it were not for the NHS, I would not be here to speak to you this afternoon.

The furore over the closure of public libraries has thrown up a *cause célèbre* in an unlikely place: Kensal Rise in Willesden, inner north-west London. The local council wishes to close this library. Among the prominent literary figures who have sprung to its defence are Philip Pullman and Alan Bennett. The library has an interesting history; the opening ceremony in 1900 was performed, improbably but appropriately, by Mark Twain. The land was owned by All Souls College and, indeed, the road outside is named College Road. My earliest years were spent in the house directly opposite and the library proved to be a formative influence. When I went up to Christ Church, one of my contemporaries was a Mr David Willetts. I remember him well as a very able, interesting, engaging man with a nice sense of humour. It mattered not at all that we were not of the same party political persuasion. We had long and stimulating talks, mainly on politics; he used to ask me what I thought the elements of a Conservative policy on a particular subject should be and we would have a lively, constructive and perfectly friendly discussion about it. I am sure we could do the same today; indeed, I am told the minister might well be prepared to discuss his policies with us and, indeed, may actively wish to do so.

My third and final point is that it would be an utter disgrace if higher education were to prove to be the only sector not to stand up for itself by defending the universities as a public good. It is hard not to conclude that the long game being played here aims to propel universities into the private sector on the American model. The announcement in last Sunday's papers of the launch of the New College of the Humanities based in Bloomsbury—a for-



profit private institution not subject to the fee cap; a tuition fee of £18,000 a year plus £10,000 living costs is proposed—only confirms this view, notwithstanding the alleged motive of a riposte to the government's swingeing cuts. Professor Sir Andrew Motion warned us that the barbarians are at the gates once again; they may be well inside them by this time next year, when we are sufficiently distracted and sated by bread and games, or so our masters hope. Strange, is it not, that we seem to have money for some things, such as hugely expensive weapons of doubtful utility and ill-advised foreign wars, but not for others and apparently not for the arts and the humanities. I would hope that in this University, Mr Vice-Chancellor, we are motivated by principle, not led by expediency; inspired by civilised values, not commodified by the market place; and characterised by an elitism defined by intellectual attainment, not by material wealth. If the search is for policy, that will do for a start. I commend the resolution to this House.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Charlie Louth.

**Dr Charlie Louth, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, Queen's College**

I am speaking today because, as will also be the case for most people here, I have sat through too many meetings at Oxford and elsewhere for which the general tenor has been: we don't like this, we wish it wasn't happening, but it's going to happen and we should just make the best job of it that we can. Whether it has been the so-called benchmarking, QAA, RAE, tuition fees, the REF, or more recently 'impact', universities collectively have gone along with things they never should have and have contributed to a general decline it is in fact their duty to resist. To put it another way, too many of us have a bad conscience. It is proper that the government should have a role in deciding what its universities should be like, but the universities should not be a sub-function of the state and if the government starts pursuing ideas that are damaging to higher education, forcing it to comply with an ill-credited business model which has little relevance to education, then we should not kowtow and hope for the best. It is actually amazing how far things have gone already; the idea that the business way of doing things applies to all domains of life is now so widely accepted that we scarcely notice it. To adapt a line from a Wim Wenders film: the managers have colonised our unconscious. As you

all know, one of the recommendations in the Browne report, implemented without hesitation in the Comprehensive Spending Review, was to withdraw almost all direct funding of teaching in universities and to replace it with a form of lottery. Instead of the block grant, reflecting the idea that education is a public good, there will be personal debt, implying that university education is only of benefit to the person receiving it. How much support subjects get will in the end be determined by how many students sign up for a given course. What this will mean is that the humanities will be left to fend for themselves. Not much argument has been offered for this, but it doesn't need to be, because the thinking behind it—if it can be called that—is painfully clear: the humanities serve no purpose, by which is meant they are not productive, by which is meant they do not 'produce economic growth', to quote Browne. Now, in some cases, it can be shown that this is simply not true, but to seek to do that is to fall into complicity with the economic fundamentalism that characterises the Browne report. In the end, even if humanities can pay their way, that is not why they matter.

Of course, there has been a financial crisis, but that is all the more reason to guard against being driven by purely monetary imperatives now. We need to remember what higher education is for, what we are here for, what a university is or should be. Not many of the policies issued from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills seem to want to remember it. The Browne report has only one thing in mind: the conversion of our university system—still, despite problems, one of the best in the world—into a giant shopping mall. Browne and the spirit in which the coalition has adopted his findings are a stark reminder of what happens when a single principle is allowed to exclude all others. The arts and the humanities can help us think more variously about what a university is for, and that is part of their value. The humanities are usually based in the reading of texts and reading is an activity in which many possibilities co-exist and certainties tend to fall away. Though there can be wrong interpretations, there are never uniquely right ones; some refinement, some reversal, is always possible. In a class, all students are on an equal footing. They learn to think for themselves and to ask questions, to be critical and to use their imaginations. They learn to contradict and the teacher becomes a student too.

It is a version of democracy; ideas are not made instrumental, tied to particular purposes, but are explored for their intrinsic interest, pursued in a spirit of curiosity and openness. This experience, in which meaning is created and undone and shared, is vital for understanding how we are what we are, and vital for helping us to realise that things don't have to be how they seem to be. It goes without saying that this kind of open enquiry will be compromised when students are forced in effect to buy their degrees. It may seem idealistic to talk like this, but it is not; it is realistic, pragmatic. The humanities can help to remind us that enrichment doesn't just mean getting richer, that empowerment is not just a question of earning power—and our survival as a civil society may depend on knowing this. A vote of no confidence will clearly assert that the current priorities in higher education are wrong and that other solutions are possible. We owe it to ourselves, to this and to many other institutions, to our present and future students, to take this opportunity and send a clear signal. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Laura Kirkley.

**Dr Laura Kirkley, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, Queen's College**

'Upon the education of the people of this country, the fate of this country depends.' That was Benjamin Disraeli speaking in 1874. Nearly 140 years later, the University of Oxford can be proud that in October 2011 a broader spectrum of those people than ever before will matriculate in this theatre. State school pupils received 58.5 per cent of offers in admissions this year. Amongst those students, there will be those whose innate gifts and love for their discipline will develop exceptionally during their time at Oxford. They will work like Trojans, they will progress to postgraduate study and they will shape the research communities of the future. Or will they? I came to Oxford from a comprehensive school in the North East, the first in my family to attend university. For me, academia was an early and a powerful vocation, but I can testify that the cost of postgraduate study and the fierce competition for even low-paid academic jobs was almost too daunting to contemplate. If the proposed reforms go ahead, postgraduates could incur debts totalling £87,000. A career in academia is neither long enough nor lucrative enough to make that a sensible

investment. Any but the most affluent will be forced overseas or out of the profession, but brilliant minds hail from all sectors of society. If we want to nurture world-class research communities, we must be able to select postgraduates on the quality of their intellects and not the content of their bank accounts. We cannot ask less affluent students to saddle themselves with more debt than salaried peers will ever have to repay, or to accept financial insecurity as a long-term fact of life. So, instead, we will draw the tutors and lecturers of the future from a small pool of affluent individuals and risk forming substandard teaching faculties as a result. Even the wealthiest won't then be willing to pay substantial fees for such a second-rate education. We all know that many postgraduates are not future academics, but driven instead by strategic or vocational goals. Certain university departments rely heavily on postgraduates for funding and for many the appeal of high fees lies in the beguiling vision of a newly moneyed higher education sector, paid for by droves of students jostling for position in a competitive market. In fact, many students will simply be unable or unwilling to pay. Naturally, new graduates are already looking to more financially supportive systems of postgraduate study outside the UK. Even mature students with relative financial security are bound to think twice because in general they also have more financial commitments: mortgages, children. A sudden increase in fees and their numbers will plummet. If the proposed reforms go ahead without challenge or protest from us, we will bring to market debased and devalued universities. The result will be whole sections of our population disenfranchised and frustrated, priced out of personal development, and a lost generation of thinkers, researchers and teachers. There can be no financial compensation for that. I ask you to vote for the resolution.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr John Parrington.

#### **Dr John Parrington, Department of Pharmacology, Worcester College**

There have been many excellent points made about the damage that would be done to the humanities and social sciences by government measures. As a biologist and a lecturer and tutor in medicine, I would like to explain why I believe these policies will be an equal disaster for the sciences, including the biomedical sciences and medicine that I teach. The government

claims it supports the sciences, yet its actions say otherwise. Science depends on new talent, yet increased fees—and surely £9,000 a year is just the beginning—threaten to choke such talent before it has a chance to develop and we should remember that talent can be found in the most unexpected places. At the age of fourteen I decided I wanted to become a biochemist, but I was unfortunate enough to go to a school where one of the most popular extra-curricular pursuits was shoplifting. Any apparent interest in learning would see you labelled a swot by your peers, and even the teachers tried to sabotage my ambition to read Natural Sciences at Cambridge because it did not fit into their narrow vision of what someone of my background should aspire to. I did however realise my dream of getting to Cambridge because of a sympathetic admissions tutor and a government grant that paid my fees and living expenses at university. I could point to more illustrious examples in which people from a humble background have gone on to become the greatest scientists in their fields. I recently heard from our own Professor Peter Somogyi, an FRS and a world leader in the study of the brain, about his background in a poor, manual-working-class family. I could mention Sydney Brenner, Nobel-Prize-winning biologist and co-discoverer of the genetic code who did a DPhil in Oxford, but who as a child famously taught himself to read from the newspaper used as his family's tablecloth because they were too poor to afford a proper one and certainly too poor to afford books. Despite their backgrounds, both of these individuals were able to realise their immense potential thanks to government support for their university education, and we as a society have benefited as a consequence. Now, I know that Oxford is developing generous bursaries for students from poorer backgrounds and of course such measures will help to offset some of the damage caused by government policies, but Peter Somogyi agrees with me that the students most in need of such bursaries are those least likely to be aware of them. After all, if my teachers would not even support my application to Cambridge, why would they tell me about such bursaries, even supposing they knew about them? Unfortunately, it is schools such as the one I went to that our outreach schemes still barely reach, yet I fear the government policies will make things far worse in this respect.

If it is going to become increasingly daunting for students from poorer

backgrounds and under-performing schools to apply to a top university to read science, how much more so for medicine, the subject I teach, with its extended career track? I received an email yesterday from William Seligman, one of our third-year medics, about the threat the government's policies pose for access to his subject. Being the Student Finance Officer for the BMA Medical Students' Committee, William ought to know what he is talking about. He believes that if the government does not reverse its policies, medicine will become even more under-representative of society than it already is. UCAS data shows that twenty-nine per cent of students on all courses come from the lowest socio-economic groups, and in medicine this figure is only thirteen per cent. William is particularly concerned about the future of the graduate entry route. Students on this course are unable to access tuition fee loans to cover their first year of study and so, under the new regulations, these students would have to find £9,000 up front. In addition, students eligible for the NHS bursary that currently covers years five and six of the normal undergraduate course and years two to four of graduate entry may soon have to pay a large portion of these fees themselves.

Graduate study in the sciences is also threatened as funds for DPhils become increasingly difficult to find, not to speak of the cuts in our research grants that fund our postdocs, and even though science funding has been ring-fenced, freezing a grant is a cut in real terms. Yet the squandering of our scientific base, this base that could lead to the next wonder drug or a revolutionary advance in surgery, is being carried out to feed the voracious appetites of the bankers who, having recently brought the world economy to the brink of collapse, far from bringing prosperity and stability to the majority of the population, merely seem to be using the money to plan new speculative ventures, threatening to bring misery through falling incomes and world food shortages, while meanwhile the gap between the super rich and the rest of us grows wider each year. Opposition to attacks of this scale may seem daunting, yet I am proud as a tutor in medicine that vigorous opposition to government health policies by doctors has forced a halt, at least for the time being, to some of the more extreme plans of the government. The doctors saw that, despite the rhetoric, government plans threaten the very future of free quality healthcare for everyone. We ought similarly to be



aware of the mortal danger government policies pose to teaching and research in our universities, not just in the humanities but also in the sciences. I hope for that reason you will join me in voting for the resolution, so as to send a strong message not just to the government, but to those in the Labour Party who are in many ways the joint architects of these policies, that enough is enough, and we are not willing to see our country's future squandered for the interests of super-rich individuals increasingly out of touch with the needs of humanity.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Alexandra da Costa.

**Dr Alexandra da Costa, Faculty of English, St Hilda's College**

As an early career academic, I would like to address the impact the minister's proposals will have on access to academia as a profession and why this should undermine our confidence in him. The government insists that the language of business should be used and applied to higher education. I dispute this, but taking the government on its own terms really represents the incoherence of its policies. The minister's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills declares that the membership of professions needs to reflect the diversity of modern society and the customers that need to access their services. In response, the Gateways to the Professions initiative was set up 'to tackle the full range of issues and barriers faced by talented students from low income families seeking to enter the professions through higher education.' I applaud this aim but, despite this, the government seems blind to the fact that they are effectively barring those same talented students from joining the academic profession. Even if, as the government claims, a higher burden of debt will not put students off undergraduate study, the additional burden of postgraduate study must surely be a deterrent. Under the minister's proposals, aspiring academic professionals could receive their doctorate burdened by more than £40,000 of debt, taking into account only the fees of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. As the Chancellor acknowledged in his letter to the University on 15 March, 'If many of the potential postgraduates of the future will be carrying substantially increased loans from their years of undergraduate study, then the decision to continue their studies at a graduate level may become more difficult.' The Sutton Trust has observed

in a report already that 'students from professional families and students who previously attended independent schools are overrepresented at postgraduate level... thirty per cent of postgraduates are from professional families, compared with... thirteen per cent of the population as a whole.' The Trust goes on to argue that 'a lack of financial support at the time of postgraduate entry may be starting to deter those from poorer backgrounds from further study.'

This problem will only be increased when the effect of the minister's proposal hits students from lower-income backgrounds a second time when they begin their job search. A cursory survey of academic jobs currently being advertised suggests that postgraduates might recoup the cost of their education if they secure a lectureship or permanent post. However, aspiring lecturers must undertake at least a year of uncertain temporary work for significantly less remuneration, whether it be filling gaps in lecture provision or covering for those on maternity leave or sabbatical. That is the reality of the current academic job market. One Oxford college is currently advertising an eight-hour stipendiary lectureship with a stipend of £16,000. Another is advertising a three-hour stipendiary lectureship with a stipend of just £7,000. Doctoral students wishing to become lecturers must invest heavily in what amounts to unpaid or poorly paid work experience, as colleges attempt to provide teaching where there is no budget available for a full-time post or full-time cover. The Chancellor admitted in March that the sharp challenge of sustainability in undergraduate teaching has already caused distortions in the complex life of our academy. Coping strategies based on internal cross-subsidies carry negative effects, for instance in our support of postgraduates. This will only worsen, especially in the humanities, as cuts in the government funding take effect. This state of affairs already favours those who have substantial savings or support from their families, husbands or wives. But when the cost of embarking on an academic career increases, many more without such resources will give up prematurely. The narrowing of backgrounds, views and experiences of lecturers and academic professionals will impoverish higher education immensely. In summary, I believe that the government needs to take a wider view of higher education, one that encompasses not only the needs of those taking undergraduate degrees. It also

needs to prevent academia from becoming a profession open only to those with professional or wealthy backgrounds, with the existing financial means to bear heavy debt and years of financial instability. The failure to suitably manage this issue will see higher education becoming education by the wealthy for the wealthy. The minister's reluctance to address this problem before it worsens must bring the competence of his policies into question. For this reason, I will be supporting the motion and beg that you do the same.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Abdel Razzaq Takriti.

**Dr Abdel Razzaq Takriti, Department of Politics and International Relations, St Edmund Hall**

I am a JRF and a recent DPhil graduate. Speaking to other colleagues in the same position, it became clear that each one of us is asking the same two questions. What does dwindling public support for research mean for us? What does that, in turn, mean for the future of the University in particular, and British universities in general? The answers to these questions are far from positive. The spectre of university closures, departmental cutbacks, externally imposed research agendas and starved funding bodies is a bleak one. Far from being a stark dystopia invented in our minds, this is a genuine threat that is looming over every young scholar, endangering the very basis of our *raison d'être*: the enterprise of free enquiry and learning. In this distinguished forum, we have a rare opportunity to express our concern at this encroaching scenario and to draw fast our red lines on the purposes of higher education. The ill-articulated and incoherent policy that is currently being advanced by government will have clear negative effects. Reduced funding will lead to fewer positions being available nationwide. This means that a generation of Oxford doctoral graduates is threatened with unemployment. After all, Oxford is an educator of educators, providing advanced training for scholars who staff departments across the country and the world. Even if Oxford manages to maintain the same amount of positions it has at present—which, in light of the current policies, is doubtful at best—its graduates will lose out on the prospect of employment elsewhere in the country. The brain drain that this country has suffered from for so long will not only persist, but will increase rapidly, with Oxonians and others forced to scramble for jobs abroad.

In this atmosphere, fewer of the brightest students will choose to continue graduate study, having to worry about higher fees and fewer employment opportunities.

And what about our image abroad? This image is already damaged by the fact that our graduate programmes are starved of adequate governmental funding. Our main weakness is not displayed at the undergraduate level, but at the graduate one. The majority of the world's brightest students already choose to continue their studies at institutions that not only provide free tuition, but living allowances as well. So far, Oxford's household name has carried it through this reality, but will it be enough to allow us to survive another round of funding cuts? Can Oxford's reputation survive in light of suggested policies hinted at by the current government concerning the selling of places? The news headlines of the past month have already harmed Oxford's image abroad, but far more damaging would be if these positions were turned into reality. What will come next? Will we be forced to open more short-term programmes, with lower admission standards and far higher fees? The government will surely be responsible for putting us in such a position, unfairly cornering Oxford, along with the entire British higher education establishment, for that matter. Coming here today, I thought of how the journey of every Oxford student begins and ends beneath this lofty ceiling; of how the life of every Oxford scholar, young or old, is shaped by the decisions taken here in the spirit of democratic deliberation and mutual respect. Binding generations of us together is a silent but absolute contract, a shared moral universe whose ultimate secret is revealed in the drawing above us. Each one of these thirty-two panels is carefully painted and scrupulously assembled to produce in their collectivity an illustration of 'truth descending upon the arts and sciences to expel ignorance from the University.' Remembering this bond, I urge all of you to stand with those of us who are just beginning their academic journey and to strongly support this motion today.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Margaret MacMillan.

**Professor Margaret MacMillan, Warden of St Antony's College, Faculty of History**

Pretty much everything I want to say has already been said but that, of course, never stops an academic. I wondered whether I

would speak today, because the last thing I want to do is damage this University and cause any more problems for those in charge of the University as they try and carry out the very difficult negotiations with the government, as they have been doing for the past year since the last election. But I thought it was important to speak. I think it is important that we express the deep concern that is running through this University and is running through the higher education system in the United Kingdom. I think it is important for the government to know that we do not have confidence in the policies it has been following. I would like to leave aside the minister himself because I think he is probably in an impossible position; it should not be personalised, but I think the government policies themselves give a picture of—a word which has been used much today—incoherence. They seem to me to be making policies on the fly; they will try something and when that doesn't seem to work, they will try something else.

There was a report, a very full and thorough report, commissioned from Lord Browne and the government took that report and cherry-picked pieces out of it, took the things it wanted, changed it and paid no attention, I think, to the report as a whole. There is meant to be a white paper and this seems to me a very strange way of making policy. Normally, you have a white paper, as I understand it, and then you make your policy. When the white paper is finally produced, most of the policies will have been made and I suppose that it will be written in the conditional, or perhaps in the past imperfect. The results of this policy have not been to help students. If—and it is a big if—if the government had decided to take the cap off fees totally, then I think we could have done something to have a needs-blind admission. As it is, we give a sort of package which is going to be difficult—and I find it impossible—to understand, with the best will in the world. I think it is going to be incoherent and impossible for students and their parents to try and make their way through it, and it will not be needs blind. Even students from the poorest families will still end up with debt. The results of this, I think, are that the universities have found it extremely difficult to make policy; we don't know where the government will go next, we don't know what conditions the government will impose next. When it turned out that a great many universities were going for the higher level of fees, the government suddenly decided it had to

limit admissions because they were going to end up with a debt which they had not expected. It is impossible to make plans in such an atmosphere, to do coherent planning.

What we have ended up with, I fear, is a situation in which we have less government money and more government control and that seems to me a very bad combination. I worry also about the message that the government is sending out. It is sending out a message that it does not like the way British universities have been running so far, it does not like the nature of British universities so far. By cutting almost totally the funding for teaching for humanities and the social sciences, and by cutting back really drastically on research for humanities and social sciences, but by ring-fencing what it has deemed to be the more useful subjects, it is sending the message that what we have been doing to date is pretty much the wrong thing: we have been wasting our time and wasting our energies on subjects that are not useful. I think we are also sending an international message. British universities, I think, are enormously important—and I speak as a Canadian from North America—in providing alternative models of education to what has been a very powerful North American one. I think there are many strengths to that North American one, but that is not the only model for education in the world. I think what Oxford has offered is a different perspective on the world, a different way of doing things; I think it's offered different things to students, it has certainly offered different things to people who come and teach here, it is a very different sort of institution. I fear that the message the government is sending out is: 'we don't like this sort of institution, we don't think it's worth saving, it may represent a huge investment on the part of the British people over the centuries, but that investment we no longer think is worth protecting.' The final thing I fear—I have many things I fear apart from going over my time—the final thing I fear is that we will be tempted, all of us, to bring in more and more high-paying foreign students. I think that is a danger. I don't think we want to end up as finishing schools for the rich from around the world. We want the best students; we don't want the ones who are the most affluent. So I will be supporting this motion.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Mr David Barclay.

**Mr David Barclay, President, Oxford University Student Union, Worcester College**

Last Friday, I met with a man who has had a huge impact on my time here in Oxford, the Provost of Worcester. We were talking about the government's plans for higher education and after making a point he said: 'David, if you had studied with me, we would have read together a book that would have shown you exactly what I mean.' I speak for every Oxford student today when I say that there is nothing that compares to the simple but mind-blowing privilege of hearing a great mind tell you that they want to read a book together with you. That is the heart of the tutorial system and it is what changes our lives here as students. Some people find it difficult to understand why students are so angry at a system which, as David Willetts has said, is designed to unleash the force of consumerism, to let universities be shaped by our choices, to put power in our hands. Part of the reason is that sometimes power corrupts and we want no part in the corruption of the syllabus at this or any other university. Under the government's plans, the choices of seventeen-year-old school leavers, with poor information and many different and varying perceptions of financial pressures, will inevitably push some subjects to the brink of extinction and so narrow the scope for genuine intellectual enquiry for generations to come. If we were to bow to student choice and the government's targets on access, we would slash Classics and improve and increase other subjects, but this would be a move that students from every discipline would be horrified by. In my hometown of Glasgow, a great university has already started cutting courses in eastern European languages; a liberal economy endangers liberal arts and, frankly, we never asked for that kind of power.

But the real reason why we fear the market in our University is hidden in the Provost's great phrase about reading together. The market which this government is so desperately trying to create has absolutely nothing to say about students and tutors discovering and rediscovering the world around them in partnership. A consumer-producer relationship cannot and will not enhance the power of what we do here in Oxford, it can only diminish it. The fundamental lack of confidence from the student body stems from this gut sense

that the core of the government's plan is rotten and would turn our successors into the Orwellian definition of cynics, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Many people get very angry about the government's intellectual and practical contradictions, and rightly so, but it is the people that I speak for who will feel the real cost of the political confusion, the mixed messages and the U-turns. I speak for a generation of humanities students who will never have access to the new facilities they so desperately need because the Capital Fund has dried up, the public support for new buildings has been slashed and all of our fundraising is focused on bursaries and fee waivers. I speak for a generation of brilliant minds who will never become graduate students or academics because the mountain of debt needed to get through undergraduate life creates an unbearable pressure to start paying it off straight away. I speak for a generation of talented but disadvantaged students who will never even come to Oxford because they will be deterred by the unprecedented trebling of fees and by the parents for whom £27,000 is more than their family brings in in a year. I speak for all these people and today I need you to speak for them too, because today you have a chance to pass judgment publicly on the damage that is being done to higher education in our country—the chance to say that the language of the market has no place in universities, that proposals of back-door entry for the rich and last-minute bargains for the poor are simply not good enough, that it is not acceptable for a Prime Minister to force us to raise our fees and then slam us with dodgy statistics about our inability to attract the most debt-averse sections of society. But you also have the chance to start building something better—to speak of what higher education really means to the academics and students going through it every day, of how proper public funding should reflect the benefits to the whole of society of Oxford's historic mission, of why we as a sector deserve a minister who speaks the language of intellectual community and challenges us to achieve our highest aspirations. The Provost of Worcester is leaving at the end of this term and so am I, but the experience of a flourishing Oxford University will stay with us wherever we go. Today, and in the coming weeks and months, we need you to take this chance and make sure that the next generation can say the same. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call on Professor David Norbrook.

**Professor David Norbrook, Faculty of English, Merton College**

As you have already been reminded, a few days ago in this building the former Poet Laureate defended this country's rich culture of the humanities and warned that current plans for higher education will endanger it. A very different poet, J.H. Prynne, is making a similar point in Cambridge. Poetry does not seem to belong in the discussion of the arcana of university research funding but it is a central example of the kind of independence of thought that is being eroded in the current trends in educational management. Impact, output, pathway, framework: the sad anti-poetry of academics semi-mutating into CEOs, the language we have been learning to speak over the last few years, a business school language of targets and ticked boxes, a language we all know does not honestly represent what we do and what we believe in, but which we speak because it is the price of funding. This is a process that long predates the present government; heightened top-down pressure on critical and independent thought in the universities, as research is viewed in instrumental terms and placed under a business department. We are exhorted to be world class yet our higher education policies arouse derisive incredulity for their philistinism from leading academics abroad. There has been a steady erosion of the Haldane principle of keeping academic research at a distance from government. We have had increased pressure to study strategic areas of research, now pressure to prove social and economic benefits beyond academia. As Gordon Finlayson has put it, 'Incentivising academics to do high-impact research is like Arsène Wenger's instructing his players to go out and deliver increased revenue to shareholders. The economic success of the club depends on footballers focusing on playing well on the pitch, not on making money off it.' One might add to the analogy that the opposing team, let us say Ivy League United, does not have this handicap; our team is expected to compete on unequal terms. This language of 'impact', evoking an asteroid calamitously colliding with an alien planet, brutally reduces the very complex ways in which academic work interacts with the public, above all through teaching, but also through a range of publicly funded institutions from the BBC to public libraries. The impact agenda



enforces a notion of academic research in its own right as somehow outside society, lacking intrinsic benefit. Now, for a time it seemed Mr Willetts might actually call a halt to these increasing turns of the bureaucratic screw. He made noises about abandoning impact, but he has now made a U-turn. The paranoid explanation is that he believes the more intolerable demands he places on academics, the more likely they will be to demand privatisation, and recent headlines may support that view. But on current trends, privatisation could mean an increase in some of the most intrusive forms of control and there is after all an underlying consistency with other aspects of government policy—that the model of education is a product to be delivered to a customer. The customer wants whatever will gratify current needs, which are not themselves subject to any judgments of value, and is not interested in difficulty or dialogue.

But there is a different model of the university's relationships with society, one of citizenship. We may be elitist in the sense of defending difficult ideas or even obscure poetry against the faux populism of the customer model, but we can help to generate processes of debate, critical thinking and intellectual honesty that can be taken up anywhere. On that model, that vast gulf between universities and social benefit starts to disappear. It is precisely because we accept an obligation to give of our best for the public that we should support this motion. But more and more our governments and research councils seem to be training up clients who will trim their ideas to whatever the customer seems to want at a given moment, as witness the recent debacles over the AHRC and Big Society, or the LSC and Libya. We have seen over the last few years the difficulties that arise when governments commission reports and academics obstinately refuse to come up with the results the customer wants and sometimes even provoke outrage by questioning whether what the customer wants is right.

The customer that is being invoked is really a ventriloquist's dummy speaking the government's agenda. The Secretary of State offers a new funding system as giving students what they want, but his proposals unleashed the largest wave of civil unrest this country has seen for many years. Students clearly indicated they want to be citizens, not consumers. As for the customers of academic research, if you compare the universities with the

banks, can we really say it is the former the customers are angry with? Is David Willetts really doorstepped by furious taxpayers complaining that Oxford scientists' papers on quantum mechanics make a dull read, to the extent that would justify the huge amount of bureaucracy and time wasting the impact agenda would create? But better attack them than question so recently after the banking crash that we should refund our higher education system on debts. This vote today is about government policy, but it is also about ourselves, making our own voice heard without the customary evasions. I ask you to support this motion, not least because you can.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Mr Bernard Sufrin.

**Mr Bernard Sufrin, Emeritus Fellow, Worcester College**

A spectre is stalking our university system. It is the spectre of the private for-profit university and the policy of the minister is to encourage it to hunt here. But contrary to his claims, this policy will not strengthen our nation's higher education system or increase its real efficiency or make universities into the engine of social mobility. It risks providing an obstacle to them all. Last July the minister granted university status to BPP University College, a well-established for-profit, now owned by the largest educational corporation in the world. In recent times this corporation and its peers have extended their powerful lobbying operation from the US to our own shores. Their flagship establishment has been the University of Phoenix. With half a million students, it is the largest university in America. Many of its siblings are guided by the idea that the internet provides the ideal way to deliver course material cheaply. Automation reduces expensive contact time and cuts real-estate costs dramatically. Instructors have little or nothing by way of academic freedom or employment rights. Money saved in this way is spent on marketing. But in 2004 the US Department of Education reported that Phoenix had a high-pressure sales culture which encouraged the enrolment of underqualified students and made exaggerated claims for the quality of its courses. Its six-year finishing rate is nine per cent and those who do finish end up with debts three or four times those of graduates from public universities and twice those of graduates from non-profit privates. The value of their purchase? Why not use Google, then judge for yourself. There are broadcast tales of graduates

being handed nursing diplomas without having set foot in a hospital. In explaining the need to regulate this sector, the US National Economic Council recently described its business model as embodying many of the same characteristics as the subprime housing market. Institutions capture the upside of increased volume while shifting the downside risk elsewhere. In this case, the elsewhere is students and taxpayers. Closer to home, we have the New College of the Humanities, a private institution launched on Sunday and intending to charge fees of £18,000 a year. Its professoriate are described as 'investors'. My twenty-year-old son called it 'Dothechaps Hall'. In a prominent message on the launch-day website, its Master proclaimed: 'The College headquarters are in Bloomsbury, with accommodation, teaching, library, student welfare and union facilities all within easy walking distance, shared with Birkbeck College and the University of London Senate House and Students' Union.' This was news to the Master of Birkbeck who announced publicly the following day that Birkbeck has no links with the New College and no agreement to provide it with access to any of its facilities.

What a gulf there is between the squalid shenanigans we have just glimpsed and the ethos behind the widespread acceptance that public universities are a public good. But we should consider the impact that even good for-profits will have on the public universities. By creaming off the courses that make financial surpluses, they will undermine the viability of the courses that depend on cross-subsidy. No one can predict just how extensive the destruction will be. But to the market fundamentalist, there can be only one repair. Adam Smith would be gobsmacked if he were watching and, I think, so would Haldane. Yesterday Philip Pullman wrote a piece in the *London Review of Books* that for me sums up what is at risk here. He said: 'The first time I set eyes on Oxford was on a day in December 1964, when I came up for interview. It was one of those bright clear days we sometimes get in winter, and it drew the honey colour out of the stone buildings and set it against a brilliant blue sky, and I fell in love with the place. What had made me think I could come here? I was the first member of my family to go to university; I was the first pupil from my school, a local comprehensive in north Wales, to go to Oxford. Simple: I thought I could come because tuition was free, and because Merionethshire County Council

gave me a grant for my living expenses. The extraordinary benevolence of those facts now looks like something from a golden age. I am absolutely certain that if things were then as they are now, I would never have done more than dream about coming to Oxford, and the course of my life would have been utterly different.'

Colleagues, our very mission is to help change the course of people's lives. It has been damaged by the policies that have been imposed in the last year and is further endangered by the policies that have been trailed by the minister in recent weeks. We have to send a clear message to government that we want them to think again and there is only one way to send it. Please vote for the resolution.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Jake Wadham.

**Dr Jake Wadham, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, St Edmund Hall**

I would like briefly to address the central feature of the argument made in favour of the new fees and funding proposals. This is the now repeatedly stated correlation between the possession of a university degree and enhanced earning power. While its underlying assumptions tend to go ignored, the correlation has become rhetorically very powerful, enforcing a perceived opposition between the 'haves', those with both the fortune to be in higher education and the prospect of apparently higher salaries, and the 'have neithers'. It induces the subsequent question of why the latter should have to pay for the former, with the conclusion that they shouldn't. Whether or not the correlation is accepted or relevant, this divide—essentially between students and the rest of society—is in itself curious and not least because it only really comes into effect by cutting out the graduate taxpayer from the economic picture devised. Here the relationship declared between degree and earnings will of course have to show that as graduates begin to earn good salaries, so their fiscal contributions to the public purse increase. The scale of the total graduate contribution would then form an entirely coherent argument for continued state funding of universities. This logic is no longer followed. Instead, as the social, economic and cultural benefits of education are systematically downgraded, so the focus turns to individual university applicants, encouraged into hyped-up expectations of later employment reward. There is still here a future in studying but it is a private matter.

This shift of thinking then is fundamentally political. It serves to weaken public confidence in the value of higher education as a common good, to justify the withdrawal of government grants and to facilitate the transfer of ultimate financial responsibility for higher learning to the learners. It also means that the issue here is not simply one of fairness, any more than it is simply one of fees. By asking students to think of themselves as private consumers, a set of potent monetary incentives and deterrents are activated which in reality make it increasingly difficult for a university degree to be selected on principally academic grounds. The distortions introduced here into the sector leave universities having to second-guess consumer demand, while at the same time firefighting to save those subjects ill favoured by the market conditions of the moment. Correspondingly, they are tasked with having to maintain existing academic standards and at the same time levels of customer satisfaction set by the promises of individual success. The effects already generated by these proposals have been eye-opening, yet the manner in which ministerial policies have unravelled in recent weeks, as institutions sought to protect themselves from the impact of the reforms, has been entirely foreseeable. Lord Browne himself in his submissions to Commons Business, Innovations and Skills Select Committee on 22 March made clear that universities were bound to rise *en masse* to the £9,000 ceiling and that this naturally followed on from the rejection of his recommendations not to put any cap on fees. Here though, the government has done no more than to betray its own lack of faith in the marketising initiatives that it is seeking with increasing desperation to implement. Against this backdrop, and as a picture now starts to build of what is to come, it is surely time to call for a halt to haste and to communicate the profound and urgent need to reopen the public debate on future funding provision for higher education. Voting for the motion would be a significant move in this direction.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Stuart White.

**Dr Stuart White, Department of Politics and International Relations, Jesus College**

According to Tom Paine, there is one very special right that each of us has: the right, as he put it, to 'begin the world'. The world should be there for young people to launch into, not a weight that they carry on their

shoulders. In considering tuition fees, we need to keep this right in mind and we need to add some social context. Between 1997 and 2007, house prices almost trebled, so young adults today have to take out pretty big mortgages to buy a house. They have to save more to get a mortgage, and they have to save more while paying high rents. Increasingly, they start their careers in unpaid internships. They have to work to earn the privilege of a proper job, to earn the money they need to save to be able to owe a large mortgage. This is the context in which the government proposes to significantly increase tuition fees. What is at stake is access to university, and equality of opportunity in its wider sense: the ability of all young people to face their future with confidence and imagination, the right to begin the world. Some people, with family help, will cope but many, from middle- as well as low-income backgrounds, will struggle. Higher tuition fees will deepen their predicament, damaging ambitions such as ambition for graduate study, achievement and social mobility. And we are not necessarily even at the end of this road; the present policy has subsidy elements to offset the full cost of fees, such as writing loans off after thirty years. But we can't assume that these subsidies will remain. First, they cost the government money it might in future wish to save. But also the subsidy element seems to me at odds with marketisation, the essence of the new regime. The logic of marketisation is this: if the consumer faces the full cost of what she buys, then she will ask if the benefits really outweigh the costs. This is supposed to promote efficiency. But if the consumer does not face the full cost, the whole calculation is distorted. So will we see pressure in future to whittle away at the distorting subsidy element in the present policy, higher fees still, pressure to put loans on a more commercial basis? If so, even greater risks to equal opportunity are in store. Whether this happens depends in part on us. In voting for the resolution today, we do not just express opposition to a policy which carries unacceptable risks to equal opportunity. As our example is taken up by colleagues elsewhere, we start to create a new climate for policy-making in higher education. We help make it that bit more likely that future changes improve rather than threaten equal opportunity. Let us start the work of creating this new climate of policy-making in higher education. Let us reaffirm the right to 'begin the world'.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Conrad Leyser.

**Dr Conrad Leyser, Faculty of History, Worcester College**

'Lest the poor, who have no family wealth to help them, be deprived of the opportunity of studying and making progress, a benefice of suitable size in each cathedral church is to be assigned to be a master, so that he can teach the poor for nothing. The teacher will thus be protected from want and the road to learning lie open to his pupils.' So the decree of the third Lateran council in 1179, a congregation of some 200 bishops from all over Latin Christendom. One could regard this as a very precocious submission to OFFA, or as a mature response to a question under debate since the fifth century BC: what price learning? Can wisdom be exchanged for money like other commodities—or is it beyond price? It is indeed, argued Plato. His master Socrates received no money for his teaching: this was the key thing that distinguished him from the Sophists, the teachers of philosophy, who in Plato's view, were no better than verbal tricksters driven by avarice. Socrates' love of wisdom was not for profit. There were others, however, who disagreed with Plato. From the ninth century, we have a report of two Irish scholars who appeared at the court of the Emperor Charlemagne, highly learned men offering to sell their knowledge. The Emperor decided to extend to them his patronage; he found that while the sons of the nobility squandered the opportunity, the children of the poor were brilliant pupils of these teachers on the imperial payroll. Charlemagne's findings were taken up by the high medieval Church. The decree of the third Lateran council squared the circle about the price of wisdom and institutionalised a link—no doubt not disinterested—between education and social justice. Teachers would be paid, but not by their pupils, and the poor would pay nothing. On this basis, cathedral schools and universities, including this one, were established by patrons across Latin Europe. This is the charter which current government policy would rewrite. The cut to the teaching of humanities and social sciences combined with the explicit expectation that new private providers will come onto the higher education market, subverts the basis on which wisdom has been exchanged for centuries, if not millennia. As these providers start indeed to appear and the mechanics of franchising out the right to grant degrees are thought

out, or not thought out, the very rationale for universities is undermined by the minister responsible for them.

Is the resolution too personal? What we do is personal. We have insisted that it be so. When we give out degrees in this building, the students process forward and we ask them in Latin whether they agree to abide by the statutes of this University. They answer '*Do fidem*': I give my word, I pledge my troth, my allegiance. Mr Vice-Chancellor, you explain very clearly to all present why we should continue to conduct this ceremony in Latin: it sends a public signal about the active participation of students and teachers in the community of learning in this place extending back eight centuries. This is a social memory worth jealously guarding, not least because of the clarity with which medieval educators formulated the social ethics of learning. So now the question of allegiance is on us. Do we have con-fid-ence in the policies of the minister responsible for higher education, a graduate of this University? There is only one answer we can honourably and accurately give. *Do fidem?* No, *no fides*. I ask you to vote for the resolution.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Doctor Sharon Achinstein.

**Dr Sharon Achinstein, Faculty of English, St Edmund Hall**

Today I am going to speak about the concept of student choice that underlies so many of the policies advocated by this government. I am against it. Who could be against student choice? For goodness sake, I am an American: choice is right up there with motherhood and apple pie. But in this case, I think that this student choice is a way to sell a fundamental removal of choice. It's a customer choice. I have no confidence in the logic of customer choice in the University for three reasons. First, and most obviously, the emphasis on customer choice is not a strong enough defence of value across the University. It is a sleight of hand that allows this government to feel absolved from cutting funding from subjects which are seen as not vital to the national economic interest. The minister has sought to reassure us that because students will continue to choose popular subjects, such as humanities and social sciences, these subjects will stay healthy. I am not reassured. Second, customer choice is harmful to equality. School choice, implemented in the USA in primary and secondary education, has in fact been shown to increase social

inequality. Inequality emerges because there is the problem of the quality of information available to students in making their choices, as well as the nefarious influence of advertising by producers in educational markets. Our own experience in the UK has shown that a focus on indicators on which school choices are based, such as league tables, introduces a financial incentive to teach to the test. Will universities across Britain likewise have to compromise academic integrity to improve the metrics of the so-called student experience? Finally, this customer choice model lays an emphasis upon the National Student Survey. The NSS threatens to turn academic institutions into a popularity contest. I believe that this customer satisfaction survey should not be allowed to determine the funding and content of the University.

Let us compare to the US. When I was an undergraduate at Harvard, the rumour was that any faculty member who scored well on student feedback—course evaluations—would certainly be turned down for tenure. But tenure bodies understood that popularity ratings were not the same thing as academic value. Indeed, research has shown that course evaluations tend to favour flashy, cosmetic factors and that the overall incentive created by course evaluations will be for the professor to avoid controversy. There has also been shown a big gender issue in course evaluations—to the detriment of women faculty. I recall course evaluations from my early days as an assistant professor at a US research university. One commented on my fashion sense—praise, of course! But another thought I was 'not feminist enough'. These comments were at times helpful. I had to think: why would someone draw that conclusion? But I am glad that my department could put student evaluations in perspective and did not give them undue weight in my tenure case. Indeed, student feedback can be a good thing and the Oxford Student Union has been promoting academic feedback sessions in colleges, where students are treated as valued members of the intellectual community. I recognise that this informed kind of student feedback is not simply a customer's right to a specified experience but instead a responsibility. In the US too, student choice is not unfettered choice. Most liberal arts courses in the US universities have a system of distribution requirements, whereby students must take a specified number of courses not of their own choosing. Academics decide what



students ought to learn. Student choice, in conclusion, is a slogan which may sound good but is harmful to academic freedom, responsibility and equality, the principles upon which the very notion of choice depends. Our University must retain its freedom to set the values by which we educate our students. I ask you to vote for the resolution.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Patrick McGuinness.

**Professor Patrick McGuinness, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, St Anne's College**

This resolution is not a personal one, certainly; it is not even a political one. It is a trans-political one for reasons I will explain in a minute. What it certainly is, is a sign of the healthy debate that we have, that too few other universities have, that allow those of us who teach and learn and research here to express unhappiness with the politicians who seem bent on destroying higher education in such a clumsy and visionless way. It is also, I have to say, a much more edifying debate than the kind of tribalist kindergarten we commonly see that passes for debate in the House of Commons, so I would not be worried about bruising anybody. This is an orderly, civilised discussion, it is passionate and it is humbling and enlightening to hear it. I said it was trans-political and the reason for that is that actually this government might be a coalition government of Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, but no government in the last twenty or thirty years has really been a friend to British higher education and the reason for that is that our sector has been a pushover. We have sold the past a long time ago, and that is depressing enough, but today at least there is one good thing that could come of this. It is precisely by expressing our lack of confidence in this current government—this government that is wobbly, it is directionless, it is divided and it is divisive—by expressing our lack of confidence in it, we can actually change something of the policies that will be foisted upon us. We have already seen them turn tail, we have seen them U-turn, we have seen them backtrack, it is possible. Something can come of this and it is worth fighting for. We are all here because all of us, whatever political camp we come from, whatever subject we teach, whether humanities, science or something lib-demmy in between, we all fundamentally realise that this government does not know what it is doing. What is happening

really is that we are in terminal times for universities, not just individual universities, institutions, but for what the idea of a university is.

We have heard in the course of the afternoon about how impractical and ill thought the proposals for higher education are, how they will tend towards enshrining inequality rather than eradicating it, how they will commodify knowledge as if it was there to be priced and bought and sold. We have heard of the damage to future academic generations, future academic careers and communities, as graduates and young academics are priced out of the professions they wanted to serve. We have heard about the threat to humanities, the corrosion of the lecturer-student relationship and the toxic imposition of false models which we have also heard don't even seem to work where they are actually used. These are not ideological or political issues to do with Left or Right, realists versus pragmatists, humanities subjects versus science subjects. It is really just about us, as an institution, as a profession, wanting our politicians to think seriously and hard and consistently about the policies that they are going to implement. We sold the past out, I said, twenty or thirty years ago. We have been complicit in our own erosion because we accepted plan after plan, cut after cut, jargon after jargon, because we thought we had no alternative. I leave aside for now the way in which our crisis has come about, not because we resisted but because we gave in, because we adopted languages and jargons that were not ours and we accepted to be evaluated and then undervalued and finally devalued by measures that were not our own. In the end, however, this resolution cuts across all of that, all of that anger, because it goes to the heart of what universities are about. What has struck me talking to colleagues is that whatever political hue we are, wherever we come from, whether we bask in blue water, red water or the rather unappealingly named yellow water, we are all agreed that this government has neither the ideals nor even the right kind of cynicism to implement its policies. At least if we had some refreshingly polemical Norman Tebbit to fight with, but we don't have that and this is a very practical no-confidence motion because we simply don't have the confidence in this government to even have policies that we can coherently oppose because they are not coherently proposed in the first place. That is why I urge us to adopt this resolution, because

otherwise we will be preparing a future that does not need us. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Antony Galione.

**Professor Antony Galione, Department of Pharmacology, Lady Margaret Hall**

I hope that the purpose of this debate in Congregation this afternoon is recognised as giving a signal to government that aspects of its pronouncement, heralding the impending publication of the higher education white paper, have caused serious concerns in universities and fundamental aspects of proposed policies really do need to be reconsidered. We have heard with alarm in the last two weeks or so about off-quota places for the well-off and bargain-basement places during clearing, giving the impression that the unfolding policies are becoming incoherent—yes, that word again—and self-defeating in their aims. David Cameron's coalition government has demonstrated a welcome return to debate and some degree of collective cabinet responsibility and shown a willingness to listen and, indeed, an ability to change their position on various matters as a result of constructive dialogue. I regret that the motion before us today may appear to some to represent an overpersonalisation of the important issues that concern us this afternoon. However, I think that it would be unfair not to mention the minister's recent but, of late, little-mentioned record on science funding, as he is Minister for Universities and Science, as we were reminded earlier. This is of particular concern to me as a scientist and head of one of this University's science departments. You may remember last autumn that it was feared that there would be swingeing cuts to the UK's science budget. This was not, however, the case. The minister, after carefully taking into account various representations from scientists and leading science organisations in the country, managed to persuade a pressurised and hard-nosed Treasury of the importance of maintaining the UK science base. The result was the most welcome, if unexpected, ring-fencing of the science budget which is to be maintained at £4.6 billion per annum over the next four years. We must, therefore, give credit where credit is due, and I quote from a blog at the time from a respected broadsheet journalist that may come as a surprise to some. I quote: 'It was, quite simply, a virtuoso performance, a brilliant example of a minister who is utterly engaged with

his portfolio and intellectually confident enough to engage with the experts. His clear delight is knowledge for its own sake, and it is also infectious.' Any tutor, even at Christ Church, would be impressed by such a report on their own student. I hope that the minister will take stock of the constructive concerns that are being currently aired, including those by Congregation today, and that he engages again with experts and presents us with another virtuoso performance in the days to come.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Kate Tunstall.

**Dr Kate Tunstall, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, Worcester College**

This is just about the busiest time of our year. To come to the Sheldonian today, we have all had to move the things we were supposed to be doing. We had to decide not to do the things that we came to university for, be that as students, stipendiary lecturers, early career fellows, professors, tutors, heads of houses, junior research fellows, vice-chancellors and pro-vice-chancellors. We had to close the book, leave the essay or the article, pause the experiment, no doubt just as it was starting to work. We also had to reschedule some things we don't like quite as much—marking, the admin—but which we accept come with the job these days and which we will have to go back to tonight, on the weekend, in our ever-diminishing free time. The government's policies are already disrupting our lives and that is nothing compared to what might be to come. But today, we have heard a new kind of concert in the Sheldonian. Not the clunking anti-poetry of impact, outputs and pathways, but the sound of our own voices, stripped of defensive evasion. A sound like never before, of men and women at Oxford, but from different backgrounds and from all over the world. The sound of our own words rising up to the Sheldonian's ceiling, where the arts and the sciences are equal partners. We have been speaking in a shared language and about common values. Congregation has been in concert. Our verses will go round and round inside the heads of those writing the white paper. We recall: education is incompatible with marketisation. Students are not customers. Teachers are not service providers. The logic of student choice is harmful to equality and to academic freedom. There can be no back-door entrances for the rich and last-minute bargains for the poor. The

government's policies are reckless and incoherent. They won't save the Treasury any money. The PR offensive is exactly that. University education is a public good. The government's policies will damage and divide us, they will destroy our collective allegiances and they will prevent us from pursuing our common goal. The minister must have a rethink.

Our democratic self-governance means we can speak out and we must, and we offer our voice to colleagues in other institutions, to the greater congregation. This is a big thing for Oxford to do. It is also not just the right thing to do, but the good thing to do. Let us take a deep breath and in unison hold in this concert a single stirring note, the positive sound of the tradition and values we wish to defend. *Non damus fidem*. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Gildea, do you wish to reply to the debate?

PROFESSOR ROBERT GILDEA: I will say a few words. Vice-Chancellor, members of the Congregation. The eloquence of my colleagues and that of the OUSU President, demonstrating analytical acumen, intellectual power, sharp wit and deep wisdom, and encountering no opposition, makes any further words superfluous, except to say that this is a historic moment to make a difference. Let us seize it.