

OUPS AGM 2022

Radcliffe House, University of Warwick, 2nd September 2022

Agenda

- Treasurer's report
- Chair's report
- Elections and motions
- AOB

Video

Please note: the video of the Chair's report and the Treasurer's report are available at <https://youtu.be/FL1wwOGIEws>

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked those present for attending. There were 19 attendees, of which 6 were trustees.

Treasurer's report

The Treasurer presented the draft accounts.

Only one weekend event was run in September 2021 due to COVID. The bookstall was not run due to 2m distancing restrictions in place.

No funded places were given, an online alternative was offered for £20.

OUPS expenditure was minimal. Headline result was £293 loss for the year.

At end of July 2022 the OUPS reserve stood at c.£104,000, with £51k commitments for weekends booked with Warwick.

Key financial decisions:

- Continue running weekends with reduced committee to manage cost
- Run an online event for all F2F events for accessibility
- Tutor contract to include online offering
- Return money to members in the form of subsidised cost (£250 per Warwick place)
- Continue with minimal forward commitments to Warwick

The Chair noted that there is no reason to charge as much as £250 and challenged the committee to try a £50 charge per weekend to really give money back to members.

The May online event gave a break-even on the whole weekend when residential cost was £250, so this cost is sustainable in theory. The January weekend/online combination was less popular.

A question was asked about the survey that we took to find out whether people were put off by the content or the price. The Chair replied that the majority of responses suggested that the weekends were great, but people simply can't afford them.

Over 1000 people attended the LOUPS online events, from all around the world, over the same period of time. People seem to expect to be able to see online as an alternative for price and time reasons.

Chair's report

The Chair noted that three of the ECM (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) were resigning from the OUPS Committee and presented a summary of progress since 2017 with a "Report Card" to show where changes had been made.

The slides presented are attached along with the notes below, which were also published on the OUPs website.

In my last "from the Chair (Sept 2020)" I discussed the issue that the work required to run the society has increased, mainly because there is so much more interest and expectation for online events, and that it has been some years since we were able to justify paying an employee to do all this extra work. I stated that we did not have enough committee members who were willing and able to do the extra work, and that we would need to change this. Sadly, there wasn't enough to report on for a follow-up in 2021, as nothing really changed over the twelve months following my 2020 update.

Ultimately, the debate came down to a difference of opinion within the committee on the purpose of OUPS: whether it is to be accessible to far more OU psychology students or merely to offer opportunities to meet other students face-to-face at three weekends a year in Warwick? Three of us on the Executive Committee (Alex, our Treasurer, Amada, our Secretary and myself) were sufficiently convinced that it was to increase access, for us to develop and use the skills to make that possible. However, the practical reality was that the three of us were then left largely carrying the society, organising the online programme as well as the same weekends we've run for decades! This wasn't sustainable, and as a result we have decided to leave the OUPS committee at this AGM.

Consequently, I don't have anything to say in this update about what will happen in the next year, as that's for the next Chair to define and tell everyone about. Equally, as we did nothing novel in the past year there's nothing further for me to talk about there either. Instead, I thought it would be more interesting and constructive to outline what we accomplished in the last five years, so that the next committee (which is oddly enough the same one we took over from in 2017) can build on this and make it even better.

I reviewed my "Letter from the Chair" reports to summarise the journey, and the topics fell into a few categories, which I described in my Chair's Report at the OUPS AGM 2022 (watch below) and which I'll step through in this update.

Governance

Governance was virtually non-existent in 2017. There were no policies or clear processes, for example for handling Complaints, Privacy, Data Protection, Safeguarding, Accessibility/Equality etc. No codes of conduct for Members or Committee existed, no policy or procedures for Copyright or ownership of tutors' materials or for recordings of events and so on.

Even the Constitution on the website didn't match the one in soft copy or the one filed with the Charity Commission (CC). This gave us a regulatory problem that required us to spend members' funds on advice from legal counsel on what we needed to do to remedy the situation, and with a long shopping list we agreed on a roadmap with the Charity Commission to fix things. I spent many hours writing policies and rolling them out. This effort paid off in the short term: for example, safeguarding was a serious problem, and one of my earliest tasks was to manage a formal investigation by the Charity Commission on the basis of a complaint that had been registered with them against OUPS. The fact that we had agreed the roadmap and could show that we had introduced a Safeguarding Policy and a Complaints procedure for managing incidents, along with online safeguarding training for relevant committee members was a significant factor in being able to sort this out to their satisfaction.

There was no explanation for how tutors were selected - it was described to me as "kitchen cabinets" where the tutors were selected in secret meetings ... "but that's how we've always run OUPS". I spoke to ALs in the faculty, and a common reaction was that OUPS was an exclusionary closed-shop. I was told it was a "who you know, not what you know" society. So we set up the tutor selection committee with a transparent selection process instead, and have broadened our range of tutors, and can now explain why candidates were selected or not.

*All this missing formal process meant we were actually out of control "but that's how we've always run OUPS". I hope these won't fall into disuse - just having them as "a*se-cover" is not good enough.*

Finance

In 2017 OUPS was an organisation with some 500 members with a cost base that could have supported 5000 so we needed to take some simple actions to cut our running costs to a more appropriate level.

We reduced duplication of effort - we generally have 3-5 committee members teaching (a problem in its own right from a vested interests perspective that the tutor selection committee helps with) but the advantage is that with the current numbers attending we only need an extra person per 25-30 attendees to make sure that things run smoothly rather than the whole committee attending three times a year. We didn't need to do things that may

have been needed before, like offer medical assistance or registration because guess what? Warwick need to have trained staff who can do this anyway!

We were no longer big enough to justify having a paid administrator, and when we introduced online credit-card payments were able to remove phone costs and bank machine rent as well. Only Paypal was available, or payment by credit card over the phone - another information security nightmare - but we introduced payment on the website with all major card issuers, and were able to dump two Barclaycard machines that were costing £140 per month, along with the phone line. This alone is equivalent to the cost of six free places a year in Warwick ...

We introduced paperless materials, saving trees (we often collected box-loads of discarded printouts from the lecture rooms afterwards) and £4,000 per year on printing costs, and when we were told by more people than not that they hated badges we stopped paying to label people.

Our running costs were therefore reduced by approximately £25,000 per annum.

OUPS is a charity so our stated goal has been "break even +/- 4%". But this hasn't taken into account the fact that we hold in trust £104,000 for our members (see OUPS 2021 Draft Accounts). This is your - OUPS members - money, and the trustees are charged with using it for your benefit. It's not mine, or the Treasurer's, or the committee's money - it's yours. If you're not seeing a benefit then you need to ask our committee why they are not using your money for your benefit. If you're not able to pay or can't take time to come to Warwick, ask why your money isn't being used to help you!

With falling numbers on our weekend events, we were able to re-contract with Warwick and thereby free up substantial amounts of members' funds that previously had to be held in reserve. The current committee agreed to use this money to subsidise the cost of attending Warwick by £75 per attendee. However, as I stated at the AGM we just picked a number to test the effect of reduced cost on demand, and we still only got 50-ish attendees each time so it seems likely that the cost is still too high. Practically, we could subsidise costs by £100 or £200 - I suggested running a £50 weekend to really test whether the problem is cost or content.

Remember - it's over £100,000 of your members' money so we could do this! I don't know why you don't demand it ... #itsyourmoney.

Accessibility

All event materials were printed and there were no soft copy/online materials. This was partially to prevent slides being shared, but mainly because we had no practical alternative. So we built a paperless distribution system that meant that we could send out PDFs, individually stamped to preserve copyright for the authors, as soon as we received them, which also enables students with particular needs to re-size/re-colour the materials in advance, and anyone who wants to print them is free to do so too for up to ten years after they attend.

OUPS only offered face-to-face events. There was an established principle that we never even provided audio recordings because “it would put people off coming next year”. We changed this, and it didn’t. We introduced audio, then video recordings and eventually full hybrid and live streamed online events, even though I was told that “that was not what OUPS was about”. However, LOUPS had over 1,000 online attendees in our first year, with speakers and attendees from around the world, so I think this is an important part of what OUPS needs to be about in the 21st century.

We were told that students couldn’t afford to pay all at once, and a suggestion from one member was that enabling payment by instalments might help. I put the idea into practice by building savings schemes and 3/4/5/6-payment monthly instalment schemes and these were indeed quite successful. A number of students said that they wouldn’t have been able to attend without them, but actually the problem was that more students were simply unable to afford the weekends no matter how many instalments they could pay by.

Faculty Liaison

OUPS had a toxic reputation within the school of psychology when I became Chair, and Abi, as OUSA rep for the society, agreed to take on the challenge of making direct contact with the faculty so that we could try to build a positive relationship.

Progress was slow but steady, and we eventually reached the point where we had scheduled quarterly meetings with the head of school, and held an open day with the school at the OU in Milton Keynes with exhibitions and lectures. We were getting some publicity on the module websites for non-module events, and had a comms channel established. We were talking about funding and about tutor recruitment between the school and OUPS. We had guest speakers at Warwick and in LOUPS (conferences and post-graduate events) whose expenses and accommodation were paid for by the school. LOUPS ran events where the cost of the venue was shared with or even paid by the OU.

So we made some quite remarkable progress until COVID hit, along with some apparent back-channel comms that killed the relationship stone dead. I don't know what happened but we don't even get emails answered now.

For me, the “OU” in OUPS is critical: “No OU = no OUPS”. Having a base of 20,000 psychology students of whom 1% are paying OUPS members is abysmal, but the reality is that we can only get in touch with significant numbers of students with the help of the School of Psychology. I don’t know how the next committee can repair the relationship but I’ll watch with interest.

Modernisation

I’ve mentioned online payments and paperless materials which were both hugely significant improvements but which in 2022 are hardly worthy of mention, and I’ve talked about online events and so on earlier, so I’ll just comment on a couple of other improvements here.

The website was virtually unusable, there were no images/videos/downloadable materials. The software was so far out of date that I had to build a replacement from scratch over the course of a year, on the latest software available. This was launched urgently when the

original one was finally hacked one day and the pages filled with Viagra links. This also allowed us to share images, videos and all the things we would expect on a normal website these days.

The OUPS mailing list was out of date, unmanageable and illegal from a data protection/GDPR perspective. After significant work we had created a new list that was compliant and that didn't result in most of our mailshots being rejected by mail servers as coming from an untrusted source.

Committee "elections" were held at the AGM in Warwick, where we struggled to attract enough people to form a quorum. We replaced this with an online election system where we could give members the proper information and ability to vote without having to be present. Sadly, the level of engagement is disappointingly low, but at least we are acting legally.

Conclusion

There was a huge gap between what was needed to run OUPS in 2017 and what was in place. We needed a committee who would roll up their sleeves and try to provide what our members wanted, though I appreciate that this wasn't what many of the long-serving committee originally signed on for. Although open in theory, we had a committee model that discouraged many people who could have contributed a little and thereby shared the load and enabled us to do so much more, and this proved impossible to change in the last few years.

I know we achieved a lot in these five years, but I hope we also made some progress to reverse the impression that OUPS was a society for the benefit of the committee not the students, and I hope that reputation doesn't come back. In the meantime, I'm looking forward to spending my time building out the London group and hope we'll see lots of you there.

And remember, as I said above #itsyourmoney 😊 So tell us how to spend it for your benefit.

David Byrne, September 2022

Election and motions

The Chair noted that there was no election, and that this was a disappointment. The committee has been filled by self-nominations and secondments - essentially the committee voted itself in.

This shows that there is no interest by members of the society in running it. The Chair asked attending students to consider getting involved - "Students running a student society" and thanked those committee members who filled the places.

There were no motions for consideration and no AOB.
The Chair thanked those present and closed the meeting.

Close of meeting