

OUPS AGM 6th May 2017

Chairperson's Report

This has been a rather mixed year for OUPS. We have managed to adjust quite well to the ongoing changes to the OU psychology programme; and put on some very successful course based and more general events. This has required even greater input of time and effort from the executive committee; who I think have done an excellent job. However, clearly everyone doesn't share my opinion and the team have at times felt under severe pressure from attacks by a few OUPS members who argued they were being unfairly treated.

We will see later what the outcome of this election is. Change and growth in an organisation is important and we can certainly use some new drive and new ideas. This is one reason why I am standing down as chair. I have been doing the job for too long. When first I became involved with OUPS, I spent many years battling with the OUPS establishment; only to find myself now at the centre of it. However, what worried me recently was the prospect not simply of change but of a revolution; the idea of a complete takeover by a group who had no experience of running OUPS events.

And there is a great deal of effort and knowledge involved in organising our events. I'm pleased to say that most events over the last year have worked well; some extremely well. We have successfully initiated a number of new types of events designed to support OU students during their courses. These include consolidation and taster weekends and methods and skills workshops. We have also run two conferences. Last September's conference on evolutionary psychology was excellent and as far as I can see the current conference on desire is likely to prove equally good. So, my thanks to Richard for all his input to the Evolutionary conference and to Fred and Abi for their efforts in organising the Desire Conference.

I've had a great team working with me over the last year; a team who can work together very effectively. A person who is actually leaving the OUPS committee and who will be very sorely missed is Denise. As secretary for many years I totally relied on her knowledge of OUPS and, in particular, her reminders of what the chair needed to do! Very luckily Amada appears to have the same qualities of organization and drive and has already become a key figure in whom to rely on in the OUPS committee. Denise also worked as a weekend officer which is a very demanding role and again one which Amada is stepping into. Our other weekend officers Evelyn and Dave also work incredibly hard organizing the weekends. I don't think many students realize just how much work goes into these weekends by unpaid volunteers. This work includes our student support officer Janet and our treasurer Alex who make the running of events feasible and the events themselves accessible. And we mustn't forget our extremely efficient and hard working OUPS administrator, Irene.

And how do you find out about the events? Maybe through Fred and OUPS organized by Abi; or through our website so effectively revamped and managed by David; or through the newsletter produced by our top grade editor Lorna. So many thanks to all the team.

Our regions have also had their ups and downs. London has continued to thrive under new administration and SEOUPS has continued its good work; driven by the efforts of Faye. Regional survival often depends very much on one individual. And we are very sorry to lose Vanessa who has worked so hard over the years to keep SOUPS functioning so well. SOUPS will temporarily be run via

LOUPS until the new committee takes over the reins; thanks again to Amada. And we are very sorry to lose Lorna as COUPS chair but we have put together a promising new committee and will try and keep up the high standards she has established.

What are our big challenges to come? We certainly need to improve our publicity in general. We are also I feel going to have to look carefully at OUPS's role. Students really enjoy attending our weekends and that is great. And the opportunity to meet other students has always been one of the advantages of our weekends. But the primary reason for OUPS is to support psychology students doing their courses and I'm a bit concerned that we are starting to stray a bit from this with people attending weekends for the social benefit alone. I don't think this is appropriate at Revision Weekends or other course specific support events where the prime aim is to support current or future students of that course. The annual conference provides an opportunity for OUPS members to be members for life and continue to enjoy the benefits. But we certainly could look at providing more events of general interest; such as our careers weekends which Abi has initiated.

At least some of the opposition to OUPS at high levels in the Social Sciences faculty seems to be coming to an end with the realization of how we can support rather than challenge the OU provision of tutorials. Recently some of the OUPS executive committee had a very productive meeting with senior people at the OU and some of us are going to meet up again in June. Hopefully we can achieve a much closer working arrangement. And this will remain a key challenge for the new OUPS administration.

There have been suggestions that OUPS needs to be run more like a business. I'm not convinced though that a business model is appropriate for a student support society. One of the big problems with the OU as I see it is a move away from the concept of providing the best education possible to a concern for running more effectively as a business. Hopefully OUPS will retain its academic and educational vision.

It is strange how one becomes reluctant to hand over control of an organisation when one has invested so much time and effort in it over the years. And OUPS is a fantastic student support institution. I kept hoping to step down but it never seemed the right time. Therefore it was great that David came onto the OUPS team and has done such an impressive job with the OUPS website. And we could use some more youthful and energetic person at the helm. I feel I can go leaving the organization in very trustworthy hands. I'm not leaving OUPS just yet though as I'm intending to support the new chair as vice-chair for the next year.

Anyway thanks for putting up with me as chair for so many years and best of luck for David and his new team. Whatever the shape of our new executive team turns out to be I'm sure that OUPS will meet all the challenges in the year ahead.