April 2017

Boat Race dinner, Friday 21 April
Can the Light Blue men build on last year’s victory? Will the Light Blue women be hoping for a drier trip this year? Of course our friends from Oxford, who are, as always, most welcome to join us, may well be wishing otherwise.

Our Boat Race Dinner will once again be held at the Melbourne Savage Club courtesy of our host, Dr Jeremy Adams. The Club is at 12 Bank Place (off Collins Street) in the City.

The dinner is not a black-tie affair, but we do encourage anyone who can muster a blazer (rowing or otherwise) to wear it, otherwise it’s a tie and jacket for men and equivalent dress for ladies.

Pre-dinner drinks will be served from 6.30pm, during which we will (assuming it’s available) screen the women’s race, followed shortly after 7pm with a two-course dinner, followed again by a screening of the men’s race.

Seats for the Dinner are always in high demand, so we urge you to book early. Guests are most welcome. Pre-payment ($90 per head) is required to our account at Westpac’s Balwyn branch: Cambridge Society of Australia (Victoria); BSB 033-089; account number 184336, or by cheque to Cam Soc Vic Treasurer at 10 Village Close, Mt Martha 3934. Any questions may be addressed to Peter Adams at golf@cambridge society.org.au.

Later in the year
Global Cambridge in Melbourne, Tuesday 25 July
For the Global Cambridge series, CUDAR are visiting a selection of cities from around the world to bring together alumni to connect, engage and inspire. The series will showcase how Cambridge research is trail-blazing the path to new discoveries, ideas and inventions. In 2017, there will be alumni events in Bristol, Edinburgh, Düsseldorf, Hong Kong, Leeds, Melbourne, Paris and Sydney.

Registration will open in May 2017. This event will be free of charge. Details will follow, but book this date into your diaries now. Expected timing is 5.30–7.30pm.

Annual Dinner, Friday 15 September
We are pleased to announce that the Rev Dr Jeremy Morris, Master of Trinity Hall, will be our guest of honour at this year’s annual dinner, to be held in the usual venue. A reception for Trinity Hall alumni with the Master will precede the dinner. We are indebted to His Honour Justice Tony Pagone and Mr Patrick Moore for offering to host these two events.

Diary dates

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Last month
Lunch with Prof Mark Dawson, Wednesday 15 March
Your scribe must apologise for a somewhat briefer than usual summary of Prof. Mark Dawson’s talk, but the science behind it is quite beyond him. Prof. Dawson was accompanied by his wife and fellow leukaemia researcher (and Cambridge alumna) Sarah-Jane. Acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) affects more than 900 Australians each year, and 300,000 globally. Current chemotherapies and supportive care fail to cure the majority of patients and the survival rate is only about 20 percent. For most cancers the treatment
stages are surgery, followed by radiotherapy and chemotherapy. With AML the first step is invalid. Chemotherapy puts the human system under great stress and if the system is predisposed to problems (due to smoking, diabetes or high cholesterol for example) this increases the stress. Chemo may appear to kill off the cancer (the patient is said the be ‘in remission’) but it is not eliminated, there are simply no outward signs of it. It should be mentioned that with chemotherapy the treatment is not forced upon the patient but people faced with this choice almost invariably choose to proceed.

The human stem cell usually develops normally and differentiates into various forms of cell that make up the human body: skin cells, liver cells, brain cells, blood cells etc. For some as yet unknown reason some cells develop into malignant forms, among which, in the case of blood cells, are leukaemia stem cells (LSC). Radiotherapy and chemotherapy can prevent further LSC development but does not kill existing LSCs.

Prof Dawson’s field is epigenetics and he is attempting to apply this to develop a third arm in the battle against AML by seeing if the human immune system can be activated to fight back against the malignant development of LSCs. Prof Dawson’s talk was followed by a very lively question time.

Golf with Oxford at Devil Bend (Moorooduc), Sunday 26 March

We are pleased to report that Cambridge won the Henry Gordon Clark trophy for the teams event by a margin of two points and Peter Baines won the individual trophy, again by two points. A pleasant morning’s golf was had by all on a course in very good condition.

Commercials

If you have an offer, message or request of a personal or not-for-profit nature that you would like us to include in this section, please contact the editor at newsletter@cambridgesociety.org.au.

Oxbridge Fiji Forum August 5–10, 2017

Five days of discussion, conviviality and fun

Come and join Oxbridge alumni from all around the world – USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Fiji – for our fourth long weekend Fiji forum. It’s a hugely enjoyable and wildly stimulating long weekend of talks, discussion – and lots of Fijian food, kava and kayaking, swimming and singing.

The weekend is being hosted by Oxbridge alumni John and Delia Rothnie-Jones, who own Daku Resort and are joint Presidents of the Fiji Oxbridge Society.

John (Cantab) was the founder of the Sydney debating forum, Intelligence Squared; Delia (Oxon) is the former President of the OUSNSW. Between them, they have an excellent understanding of the interests of our membership, and will be delivering another stimulating and rewarding gathering. Find out more at http://paradisecourses.com/oxbridge-forum-in-fiji.

Snippets

We acknowledge our particular debt to Varsity and to the University News Release Service.

Cambridge may set intake targets for poorly represented ethnic groups

The University of Cambridge’s official access agreement this year may include targets for the undergraduate intake of certain underrepresented ethnic groups and regions.

Cambridge negotiates a yearly agreement with the Office of Fair Access (OFFA), the public body which monitors and promotes fair access to higher education.

Last year the colleges rejected a proposition of giving lowered offers to students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds, keeping the standard A*AA offer. Jon Beard, Director of Undergraduate Recruitment, said, ‘if a reduction of entry standards was not considered, OFFA would expect Cambridge to either stretch existing targets even further or to introduce additional targets.’

Agreements with OFFA are often based around hard quotas, but can also include more loosely defined goals. There was some consternation over Cambridge’s agreement last year. OFFA’s director apparently personally rejected an attempt by the University to lower its targets for intake from areas of low participation from 13 per cent to 12.5 per cent. Beard presented a number of options, with members of the Senior Tutors Committee expressing ‘particular support’ for three: development of a new target relating to admission of certain underrepresented Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, consideration of a target...
related to intake by region, and rebranding of current access efforts by colleges.

The proposals noted ‘that whilst the overall [BME] representation data was positive, not all groups were equally well represented.’

CUSU President Amatey Doku said that he had contacted Beard to ‘reiterate the need for targets to be included’ in an agreement.

The University already targets ethnic minority students through its geodemographic intake goals, which aim at areas where there are already often several indicators of disadvantage to access. However, it has not recently taken on a target aimed at particular ethnic minority groups. Varsity asked the University to comment on which ethnic groups might be focused upon, and what form the targets might take. A spokesperson said: ‘Our proposals are a work in progress. We will announce further details once an agreement has been made with OFFA later this year.’

Analysis of current student statistics, however, suggests that black students may be the ethnic group most likely to be targeted. In 2015/16, the University had only 139 UK undergraduates who identify as black, excluding mixed, out of total of 11,820 – just over one per cent, compared with seven per cent nationwide.

Cambridge’s proportion of white undergraduate students (72%) almost exactly reflects the national makeup of student ethnic groups (73%). The main difference lies within the category of BME students. Chinese students are comparatively overrepresented: though just 0.9 per cent of undergraduates across the UK are Chinese, they make up almost 9.5 per cent of British Cambridge undergraduates.

The University faces difficulty in increasing representation of black students while maintaining its demanding entry standards. Limited data available from UCAS show that, out of 18-year-olds accepted into university last summer, excluding Scotland, 5.1 per cent of black students achieved A*AA or better, compared to an average of over 14 per cent from other ethnic groups. This attainment gap can be seen across recent years.

In its agreement with OFFA last year, Cambridge reported that ‘the primary factor affecting admission by underrepresented and disadvantaged groups to highly selective institutions such as Cambridge is prior attainment.’

‘Addressing the challenges posed by the attainment gap, Professor Les Ebdon, the director of OFFA, told Varsity: ‘Recent research indicates that young people from some BME groups are significantly less likely to attend those universities with the highest entry requirements than other ethnic groups. I expect these universities to analyse their own data and set out how they will address any differences they identify. There are also worrying gaps for BME students at other stages of the student lifecycle, particularly in regards to attainment and progression to graduate employment, so it is vital that universities also consider how best to support BME students to achieve their full potential once they are on course.’

Cambridge has a duty to act on its lack of diversity

A University spokesperson said that rates of application, acceptance and admission for black students are currently rising. They told Varsity: ‘We currently spend £5m a year on access measures leading to 190,000 interactions with pupils and teachers across the UK. This includes focused work with BME students; children in care; students eligible for free school meals and from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds; mature learners; and students in schools and colleges which have not historically sent students to Cambridge. ‘We will continue to work hard with schools, charities, parents and students to raise aspirations and attainment,’ they said.

The new access agreement may include expanded targets for regional intake. At present, colleges are assigned geographical areas in which they carry out access work, something which Beard suggested may be affected as part of a more centralised approach. Analysis of last year’s admissions statistics showed that Cambridge’s undergraduate intake was dominated by students from the South East and London.

Cambridge to hold drone symposium

In a world of exponentially growing technology, the policy is struggling to keep up. In the coming week, the Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange (CUSPE) will partner with Flock to host a conference on the future of drones and drone policy. Drones represent a new and exciting technology, but the boom in their growth has left policymakers in the dust. I sat down with Ali Mahomed, an intern at Flock and student at the London School of Economics to talk about policy problems drone operators face that are preventing a new technological revolution.
‘Firstly, we’re talking about commercial drones. What makes drones so impactful is that they can be used for a wide variety of purposes. For example, Amazon is proposing to use drones to deliver packages to people’s doorsteps. Walmart is proposing to use autonomous drones to count inventory in their warehouses. James Harrison is the CEO of Sky-Futures – and also a speaker in the upcoming conference – where they use drones to inspect oil rig structures and industrial facilities. The drone industry is growing rapidly and, whilst risky, this new technology provides a huge financial opportunity for the UK.’

When talking about the potential for growth and the obstacles drones may face, Ali pinpointed the problems down to insurance. ‘Right now if you want to insure a drone, its premiums are sometimes more expensive than the drone itself, which creates a huge obstacle for the industry. By law, the drone operator is going to require insurance for flights. Because [drones are] a new type of technology, insurance companies are struggling to calculate premiums that are reflective of the actual risks involved with the drone flight. Regulators have started to acknowledge the huge potential in drones – they’ve identified them as a solution to congestion in cities – and so are striving to create a healthier drone ecosystem. Flock, a London-based startup, is building a Big-Data-driven risk analysis platform for drones which aggregates real-time contextual data from the surrounding environment of a drone flight, identifying and quantifying the risks present. Flock’s algorithm quantifies the risks of any given flight proposal and provides fully customised, pay-as-you-fly liability insurance to drone operators at the click of a button. Drone operators can use the risk metric to increase the safety of their flights, ultimately leading to a safer drone space in general.’

Finally, Ali spoke to us about the public’s attitude towards drone policy. ‘I think it’s very important that people are well-informed about drones. The symposium, which is open to the public, is bringing together key players in the drone industry. Getting experts to speak on this topic and then making that material available to the public is a huge step in informing them on the potential of drones. As the drone industry continues to develop technologically, it is natural that people will gain curiosity and research into drone policy themselves, looking into the potential benefits and risks.’

Cambridge plummets in national student experience survey
Cambridge has dropped to 29th place in the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey, the first time it has been ranked outside the top ten in the survey since 2009.

The annual survey asks 1,000 undergraduates from each UK university to describe how their institution contributes to a positive or negative experience across eight areas. Cambridge’s score this year is a significant decline from the 2016 survey, which put it at 9th place in the country.

The University was given a particularly low score for student welfare, for which it was placed at 59th on the scale. The student welfare measure principally refers to the University’s perceived success in helping students to deal with anxiety, stress, and mental health issues.

It also performed poorly in the rankings for quality of facilities, for which it came 39th, and for social life, for which it was placed 44th. It was ranked 27th in the country for the quality of the physical security it offers students.

Cambridge did make a better showing for industry connections, coming 9th in this measure, which indicates students’ perceptions of the opportunities for work experience and other such opportunities available within their university.

It was also ranked an impressive 6th for academic experience, though it is four places behind Oxford in this field. Its accommodation is held in relatively high regard, scoring 7th place.

The best-ranked institution overall was Harper Adams University, a specialist agricultural university located in Shropshire. It is followed by Loughborough, Sheffield, Leeds, and Surrey. The University of Oxford beat Cambridge handily, coming seventh in the survey.