

Report of the General Board on the Restructuring of the Faculty of Oriental Studies

When compared to the speeches already heard in this Discussion, I fear that these remarks might seem slightly churlish in their brevity. Although I agree with much that has already been said regarding the proposed changes, I feel that I should confine myself to explaining why, when this report was presented to the General Board, I declined to sign it, and refrain from offering more personal views about the future of the faculty.

The first reason for not signing the Report is quite simple and is, perhaps, already obvious. As a former member of the Oriental Studies Faculty Board and a current Oriental Studies Undergraduate, I am somewhat personally involved with these issues and I wanted to avoid any accusations of having a conflict of interest.

The second reason is more substantial, if not much more complex. Students within the Faculty have not been sufficiently involved with the Review process which led to this Report, nor have they been kept sufficiently informed of the proposals. As far as I am aware, the only direct consultation of students occurred during the evidence-gathering phase of the Report, which took place between the 31st January and the 1st February, 2005. Since then there have been few official statements to the students on the current situation and no additional attempts have been made to solicit views.

This lack of consultation has led to a Report which seems to badly represent the concerns of students within the Faculty. To dwell on just the most obvious example, the gradual reduction in the number of courses offered by the Faculty has been extremely unpopular within the Undergraduate community. If this process continues it seems inevitable that the most able students will be tempted to apply to other Universities and not to Cambridge. Indeed, this must already be occurring with the closure of the Hindi and Sanskrit courses to new students. The best applicants for these subjects are, presumably, now be destined for Oxford or SOAS rather than here, at detriment to this University. There are, perhaps, sound academic or economic reasons for these actions. However, they have not been effectively explained to current students and there is no great feeling amongst the undergraduate community of having being involved with the process. Similar

concerns seem to held about many other areas of this Report and many of its more controversial recommendations. This is why the lack of explicit consultation is so unfortunate; it seems to have cut off the majority of students from involvement with the Review and this Report.

Admittedly, students are represented on many of the bodies associated with the Review and part of the blame for this lack of involvement must lie with them, myself included, for not being more effective in publicising all the issues. However, the length this review, which has been discussed for at least four generations of student Faculty Board members, makes it impossible for any one student to have a grasp of the totality of the issues. Therefore, the University must take greater responsibility in order to ensure that students are suitably involved. It seems that if 'advisory groups' are to be set up for Reviews of other faculties, then part of their terms-of-reference must be to ensure that the whole faculty is consulted and not just the Senior members. In particular, I would hope that draft proposals are made easily available to students and that their views should be explicit solicited, not just during the evidence-gathering stage, but as proposals are being drafted and finalised. In this way, I would hope that future Faculty Reviews will produce proposals that work towards the improvement of the experience of students and accurately reflect their views and concerns.