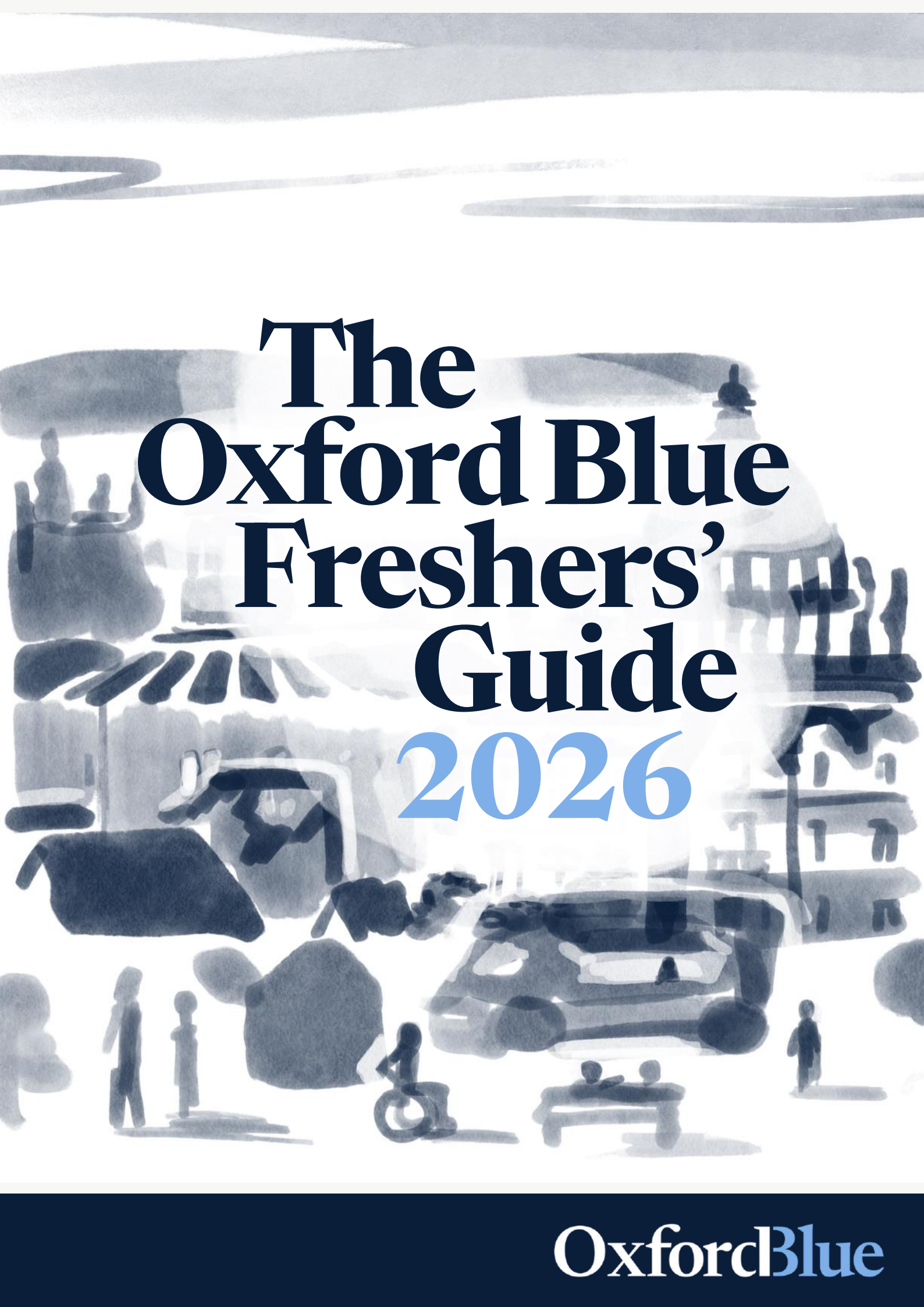




The Oxford Blue Freshers' Guide 2026

OxfordBlue

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How To Use This Guide: A Note From Our Editors

Jessica Gregory (Wadham, German & Russian)

Hi! Welcome to Oxford and a massive congratulations! I hope you've already had a chance to celebrate such a MASSIVE achievement, but if not, then please have a moment when you get here to look around and remember just how hard you worked to be here!

Oxford is such an exciting place to be in, and there's so many opportunities to get involved with, although I do understand that it can be slightly terrifying too. I want to promise you, that no matter how scared you may be, you will find your feet and, whilst everything may feel foreign now, you'll feel at home in no time. I also want to say that first year, especially first term, is a stepping stone into Oxford life. My first year wasn't how I envisaged university, and now halfway through my degree, I finally now feel I know how to make the most out of my course and college! If you get a little stuck, there's never harm in asking for help, as the most important thing to do is enjoy your subject, and make unforgettable memories!



Noah Allerton (Lincoln, PPE)

Hey! To echo Jessica, a massive congratulations and welcome to Oxford, you're going to have the absolute best time. I am sure the past few weeks have been a bit of a whirlwind: whether it be the bombardment of emails from your college with forms to fill out and contracts to sign, or trying to get your head around what on earth a "college family" is, it all leads to arriving for freshers week on 4 October!

The road ahead is not going to be easy, but it will all be worth it. You will meet the most amazing people, both friends and academics. You will be living in one of the most gorgeous cities the UK has to offer. Most importantly though, you will come out at the end of your degree with life experiences that you never could have imagined (take it from a third year who feels like a fossil). More than anything though: enjoy yourself. You only get to be a fresher for the first time once, so do anything and everything you fancy, because you never know until you try. If that inclination is student journalism, great! You are in the right place. Even if it isn't though, I hope you enjoy the rest of this guide, and can find at least a couple of useful or interesting things for your time ahead!

How To Use This Guide: A Note From Our Editors

You're probably wondering how you're ever going to read such a long guide, especially when each student paper has their own. How do you know what's important, what's irrelevant, and what's beneficial to know in three months' time?

We have collated a range of advice, and insight from each of our sections in order to give you a holistic view of the university experience. Whether student journalism, or sport piques your interest, there's plenty in here to choose from!

My biggest piece of advice would be to read the essentials. Anything in our "Getting Used to Oxford" and "Life At Oxford" sections is designed to make your transition to university easier. We have essential important information, like points of contact for mental and physical health, but we also have the *important* information for living your best student life, like your hidden libraries, coolest coffee shops, and more!

Whether you read every single page, or just skim through, this is a great chance to take some free advice at your own leisure. Make sure to save this for later in the year as well – Freshers' Week is a whirlwind of advice, and so it's always useful to have something to come back to later!

If you have any questions about anything in the guide, are interested in writing for us, are worried about life in Oxford, or anything else, make sure you reach out to us on Instagram (@theoxfordblue), or via email at editoroxblue@gmail.com. We're a friendly, approachable team, and we want you to settle into Oxford in the easiest possible way! Make sure you stay tuned for events with *The Blue* for the chance to meet us in person too, including (but not limited to) our stall at the Freshers' Fair! We can't wait to meet you!

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Getting used to Oxford

Getting Used To Oxford

What To Expect At Oxford

Mya Sidhu



Photo by Fynn Hyde, used with permission.

Coming to Oxford for the first time, knowing that it'll be the start of at least two months away from what you're used to, is a lot. That, coupled with the knowledge that you're now solely responsible for cooking, cleaning, and socialising, all while working on a degree at place that loves to flex its status as the 'best university in the world for the 10th year running' can be incredibly daunting – and when I was a Fresher, I remember feeling intensely lost above everything else. There is no definitive 'What To Expect at Oxford' list, but I hope this article can provide some of the foresight I wish I had access to in 0th week (which we tend to call 'noughth week', if you didn't know.)

The first thing to expect at Oxford is the mix of experiences that are both uni-wide and college-based. Freshers' Week stands heavily on the latter – your schedule is decided almost entirely by your college, and will typically consist of a lot of talks about the very basics of living in college – think 'welcome' talks, talks on safety and sexual health, and a lot of ice-breaker opportunities. Come well equipped with one fun fact about yourself – if you don't use it during Freshers' Week, you will definitely need it during class introductions, subject dinners, or bar events (mine is that I have a speedrun world record). This isn't to say Freshers' Week doesn't also offer one of the greatest ways to immerse yourself in uni-wide activities, as the Freshers' Fair in Exam Schools is essentially a building full of ways to join any society in existence (including ours – look out for us in the South School and say hi!). People are incredibly friendly at the Freshers' Fair whether they want to be or not, so make the most of the day and ask as many people about their society as possible.

Getting Used To Oxford

Speaking of societies, they can be one of the most important parts of Oxford life. Depending on your circumstances, finding friends, especially in Michaelmas Term, can be difficult. It might be the case that Freshers' Flu knocks you out before you can reach your first ice-breaker, or it feels like everyone else has already found 'their group' before you even know a single person's name. While my best advice in this case is to try and talk to people anyway, I know first-hand that this is easier said than done. Even with hundreds of news articles from students across the UK saying they wish they had known that everyone simply wants to make friends, the college environment can often feel like the largest gamble of your life between a friend for life, and life-long humiliation. I was not a big risk-taker.

Societies are the best way to ease the pressure. Having something in common with the person you're talking with can take off a lot of the stress when it comes to keeping a conversation going, and managing to go deeper than the first few levels of small talk. They also give you an excuse to leave college, or your subject faculty for a while to do something you enjoy, with absolutely no academic pressure.

One of my funniest memories from first year was walking home alone at midnight (not-advised, by the way) and having a porter stop me to talk about safety. The conversation somehow turned to my experience finding friends at university, where I admitted I didn't really know many people from my college, and instead had better luck with people outside college, as if it were something shameful. Of course, it's nice to befriend people from your college – and by the end of the year I had definitely improved in that regard – but that porter reminded me that it's not a necessity to know everyone at college. Ironically, that night I had come back from visiting a friend from another college that I had met at a society event.

Getting Used To Oxford

Of course, another benefit of societies is... the dreaded CV. Any society can help you gain new skills, experience, or increase your networking abilities. *The Oxford Blue*, for example, can help with all three (shameless plug). I started out as an illustrator, liaising with our Junior and Senior Editors, then a video editor for our social media and podcast. These were roles that worked quite closely with the Creative Team, where I made some really talented friends, and the Managing Director, which gave me the insight to be where I am now (helping to run the paper). I now have experience illustrating with a deadline, editing hours of footage, composing our own podcast jingle, writing and editing articles, and managing a budget. Even taking up commissions without being part of a magazine/newspaper itself can help you meet new people, and give your CV a little boost. Besides the journalistic side of Oxford societies, places like our student radio station Oxide offer a place to run your own radio show – which takes more technical knowledge than I thought – and meet other music-lovers, which can be great if you're looking for a future in the entertainment industry. Not to mention the number of talks that places like Fashion Soc, and Marketing Soc have to offer – I now have a picture with GQ Global Editor Adam Baidawi and saw Max Klymenko from the Career Ladder in person. Oxford is a strange place. Join a society.

Back to making friends at Oxford, there's another variable you might come across – the Private School vs. State School divide. In my experience, the split can appear almost confusing at first. Some privately educated people tended to drift off in their own groups, and rarely spared anyone else a look. Others were kind during classes, lectures, and socials, but wouldn't go further than that. Others can be friends for life. Some colleges have a much higher concentration of privately educated students, such as Trinity College, New College, or Lincoln College, while others don't, such as Mansfield College, Hertford College, or St Edmund Hall. As such, depending on your college, and your educational background, there are times where you may feel like an alien (or suspect that other yacht-owning students might be). The point is that there is a split in the Oxford culture, and for those with Prelims in First Year (your first public examination that allows you to progress to second year), this can be felt especially.

Getting Used To Oxford

This leads me onto the dreaded Imposter Syndrome. You'll hear it during your Matriculation ceremony from Irene Tracey, our Vice-Chancellor (which marks your official admission to the university), but your place here wasn't a mistake. You didn't breeze through your interview by luck. Your tutors are often some of the top people in their field internationally – they do not make mistakes with admissions.

With the Oxford culture, and the Private and State School divide, there's one large catalyst when it comes to imposter syndrome here, from what I've seen: discussing numbers. If you don't know, a 40 is typically a pass for most subjects at Oxford, while 50-69 represents a 2:2 or 2:1, and 70+ constitutes a first. It is amazing to pass an Oxford exam, or to get a passing grade in a class essay. That isn't sarcasm – the Oxford workload is rigorous, as is the marking, so please be proud of yourself even if you get a number lower than you expected. To get into Oxford, you're probably very used to A*s, or high percentages attached to your work. To get a number between 40-60 at Oxford might feel like a slap to the face. Do you really belong here if you aren't getting the top grades? Especially when your classmates are doing better and scorn the idea of any number below 67? First, remember that people can lie. Great all-round advice for life. Second, remember that First Year isn't, in truth, a level playing field. People have come from all sorts of backgrounds, and in my experience, it is typically privately educated students who receive higher marks early on. It is also very strange to compare numbers across subjects – a 94 could induce a mental breakdown in a Physics student, whereas a humanities student would see themselves as the second-coming of academic-Christ. Third, tutors don't choose you because of your grades. Otherwise, there'd be no point in the interview stage. You're here, above everything else, because your tutors saw potential, not because you're smart, funny, and beautiful. You're at Oxford to grow – and to be honest, isn't it more impressive to say you started out with a lower grade and made your way upwards? Not everything clicks instantaneously in the first year; that's why your degree is at least three years long. And try not to think about numbers too much. I personally smile and nod when numbers-talk reaches my table, and think about Instagram reels, which are a lot more interesting.

Getting Used To Oxford

Your first year at Oxford is a whirlwind of 24 weeks. You'll be a Fresher trying to find their place, an official Oxford student getting matriculated in Sub Fusc and listening to Latin you don't understand as Irene Tracey lists what sounds like 'Top Ten Fun Facts About Oxford History You May or May Not Care About If You Want To Go Punting After This'. You'll be making your way around a city where everything is a very particular old shade of beige, and potentially wandering into clubs where you wish you could see beige for a second. You'll be feeling homesick in your room with nothing but an apple to eat, and an essay due the next day, and also trekking to colleges in other postcodes to have the strangest (yet best) night of your life. You'll meet people you don't want to hang out with, and people you wouldn't mind talking to for five hours in a random coffee shop during the vac.

It's all possible at Oxford, so expect everything.



The Bridge of Sighs, photo by Fynn Hyde, used with permission.

Oxford's Hidden Library Scene

Jessica Gregory

Everyone dreams of staring at the curved ceiling of the Radcliffe Camera when they are studying, or getting easy access to the Bodleian whilst tourists lurk outside. But what about Oxford's lesser known libraries? Behind the spires of Oxford's tourism-driven library scene, which spaces are actually decent study spots for a student?

Radcliffe Science Library (Rad Sci; RSL) – And yes, even I, a humanities student, am writing this. Sitting on the corner of Parks Road, nestled next to Pitt Rivers Museum and University Parks, the Rad Sci provides an ideal working environment. As one of the libraries that closes the latest, the evening is the perfect time to find a spot and nestle down for a night of studying, especially as everyone else has departed. Whether you're looking to book group rooms, or study silently in the main library, there's a space for everyone. Even the common room downstairs has a whiteboard if you're looking for somewhere to scribble your thoughts. Approach with caution during exam season, however, as it can be incredibly busy!

Law Library – Certainly not to be coined one of the most beautiful libraries, but it definitely deserves its spot on the list. Tucked away from the noise of the city centre, the Law Library is incredibly peaceful, with an unlimited number of desks available, spanning across several floors. On the first floor, there's even a space for a little booth, where you can be left in peace. If you need to lock in, this is possibly one of the best recommendations.

Things in Oxford

Art, Archaeology, and Ancient World Library – As with the Law Library, this definitely doesn't deserve an award for its decoration. Right around the corner from the Ashmolean, this library takes its unassuming place. Inside, it's incredibly quiet, possibly due to the few people who would want to study there. That being said, it's a great place to work efficiently, especially in Trinity. One of the hidden secrets of this library is that it remains cool in summer due to the preservation of ancient texts – perfect for when the heatwave becomes too much!

Taylor Institution Library; “The Taylorian” (Modern Languages) – Unlike the prior libraries on this list, the Taylorian deserves its name as a beautiful and decorative place of learning. Divided into the different languages, the library has separate rooms so the sub-faculties are respected in their own right. This is particularly convenient if you have a lecture in the building. If you're planning to lock in for the whole day, there's a common room downstairs where you can eat. I would recommend getting a seat early, however, as the library is a popular one, probably just behind the main two Bodleian libraries!

College Libraries – Perhaps a cheat, but definitely underrated! Each college library has its own charm, whether its blankets to snuggle into, or bean bags overlooking the college gardens. Plus, there's plenty of added benefits, namely these being right on your doorstep, so a Sunday morning study session isn't quite so unachievable after a late night out! And, these libraries are often open a lot longer than the main Bodleian libraries, with some even being 24 hours. Make sure to attend the induction for your library during Freshers' Week, and don't forget to utilise such a key resource!

Getting Used To Oxford

Your Must Visit Café Guide to Oxford

Noah Allerton

Welcome one, welcome all! As you settle into the whirlwind that is your first term at Oxford, you will notice something about the city's streets. It has an incredible saturation of three things: Harry Potter shops, charity shops, and most importantly, cafés. The café is the everything device in Oxford. It is a third space for socialising during the day, for an important meeting between societies, or for your best lock-in of the week. Away from the familiar faces of your college library, or the eerie silence of any of the other libraries of this city, the café is a retreat to an element of normality in a city that is all too lacking in that department sometimes. I write this very article from a new café I am trying in my home city of Leeds!

As a barista myself, you're looking for a few things when it comes to a café, and these will differ from person to person. The incredible quantity of cafés in Oxford means that everyone will have a favourite, and often these differ greatly, but this simply provides more ability for exploration. Whether it be the quality of the coffee, the price, number of plug sockets for when your laptop goes low, or the general vibe, everyone has different assessing criteria. In this guide, I will touch on just some of my favourites from my two years here, but do explore! It's a wide café world out there.

My personal favourite: Crosstown, Ship Street

Unlike many other cafés on this list, Crosstown is a chain. However, it does not ever really feel like it, and, given this is just one of two locations outside London, I think it qualifies in uniqueness enough for a place here. Crosstown ticks every box really: fantastic drink quality, great price (20% student discount!), impeccable music tastes across just about all genres and lovely service from the staff, and a nice relatively tucked away location. Whether it be a Matcha Monday (any matcha for £2 before 2pm), or you fancy one of their famed doughnuts, Crosstown truly has it all.

Getting Used To Oxford

Another city centre gem: CAMELIA, High Street

Camelia offers just about everything you could want. Great coffee, but also, if you fancy a nice breakfast, they have a wide variety of pastries and cooked breakfasts for you to try. A fantastic place for studying, with the back of the café being very set back from the High Street itself, giving you reprieve from the hustle and bustle of the city centre. Camelia is fairly new to the scene, but I could not recommend giving it a try enough!

Heading south: The Independent Café, St. Aldate's

Another one of Oxford's most popular cafés, but not without good reason. The Independent Café is slightly on the more expensive side, but has incredible coffee with a fantastic atmosphere, and a wide variety of options for seating. With big communal tables as well as sink in chairs, its location towards the south of the city centre keeps the majority of tourists away, but makes it busy with people exiting Christ Church Meadow. One to definitely keep on your list!

A small place to the north: Horsebox Coffee Co., Parks Road

Located just a few minutes walk up Parks Road from the city centre, Horsebox Coffee Company sits outside the Natural History & Pitt Rivers Museum. With a small number of tables next to the eponymous horsebox, this one is definitely less of a work location, and more of a takeaway spot, but a great one at that. Whether you want a coffee to take on a walk through nearby University Parks, or just to sit with friends on the large lawns outside the museum, Horsebox Coffee Co. has got you covered, and with fantastic quality coffee to go with it!

To the east: Peloton Espresso, Cowley Road

A lovely small café on Cowley Road, I was introduced to this café by one of my friends, who was living near Iffley towards the end of Second Year, and it is definitely somewhere I am going to be returning to regularly in my final year. Peloton is fairly reasonably priced, in a nice location away from the onslaught of students in city centre cafés, and has a lovely vibe. With perfect seats for people watching by the window, or comfier seats for a more relaxed feel, Peloton is a great option for those wanting to escape the feel of central Oxford for a few hours.

Getting Used To Oxford

Five Things I Wish I Didn't Bring To Uni

Mya Sidhu

Preparing for university is a memory I would rather forget. Sure, it's easy to get excited about the idea of 'Oxford', but it was much less exciting for me to think about what type of pan I needed to make eggs without ingesting microplastics. The internet is inundated with articles, websites, and Reddit threads on 'ESSENTIALS' and 'CHECKLISTS' on what to bring to university – which, frankly, give me heart palpitations to this day. Instead, I offer what is hopefully a much lower-cortisol article – five things I wish I *didn't* bring to university, because nothing matches the heartbreak of packing up your stuff for a vac and realising it looks exactly the same as when you moved in.

One: Clothes.

Number one on the list is clothes. Absolutely, clothes. I brought way too many clothes to university. You do not need to transport your entire wardrobe to university. Having a few extra socks can be useful for when the washing machines are full (and you've just stepped into a massive puddle on St. Giles – please bring a boot-adjacent shoe for Michaelmas/Hilary), but be realistic about what clothes you're going to wear on the **daily***. I personally brought way too many casual shirts and trousers thinking I was going to be an intellectual bum sitting in college all day (English student with low contact hours, for context). Being a bum is unfortunately impossible in Oxford, I learned, as jeans and trousers became my second skin. There's so much going on at Oxford at all times, and more often than not, you will be outside. Do not bring five pairs of tracksuit bottoms like I did. Heed my warning.

***Also be mindful of BOPs. If your College's Entz Team (Entertainment/Events/No-one-knows-which Team) has released a schedule with themes, you could bring a costume from home. But, honestly, it's a lot more economical (not to mention, fun) to try and adhere to a theme with whatever you've got. You might also find a friend who, for some reason, has a wall of cowboy hats for a Western-themed Bop (true story).**

Getting Used To Oxford

Two: Kitchen Things.

I came into university thinking this was an episode of *Kitchen Nightmares* where a new kitchen magically improves my chef abilities. As such, I brought a chopping board, a spatula, a plate the size of two heads, and multiple pans – one for pasta, one for breakfast, and one for soup. I want you to think about the amount of washing up this would imply I had to do. The answer is: the thought of washing up was so distasteful that I only used the pasta pot.

The Oxford routine is no joke. Of course, it depends on how you treat your degree. I think I was a little overly-concerned with academics in first year, so it often felt like I could only treat myself to 10-minute dinners before I needed to knuckle down for another 2 hours of reading (there is no case where *Jane Eyre* requires that much reading.) Thus, that chopping board stayed in a plastic storage box for 32 weeks. On the other hand, I remember one of my roommates with a much better work-life balance would take out the chopping board, wok, and cutting knife at least twice a week to cook masterpieces I could smell from the corridor.

The question as to what to bring to uni for cooking can be answered with three simple questions:

1. *Can you cook? I mean, really cook, beyond a mean scrambled egg.*

I personally cannot cook without a completely empty kitchen, and three hours of spare time. University wasn't really the place for this, so I became a microwave/oven warrior. If you can work with college facilities, take your standard items as my roommate above did. It could be a rice cooker, a flat pan, a pot, etc...

If you're like me, you might just need one pack of utensils (please make sure they are visually distinct. People will use them, and they can get lost) and a small assortment of bowls or plates.

Getting Used To Oxford

2. Do you have a kitchen in your accommodation? Does your JCR have a kitchen?

A lot of my friends in first year had what I like to call a ‘collaborative kitchen’. This means that they had a large table (often used for pre-drinking, or games nights), a decent amount of walking space, a large fridge, a freezer, and countertop space. Mine, on the other hand, was the size of a small corridor, had a fridge half my height, and could only fit one foldable plastic chair next to the bins. The former is obviously much more conducive to cooking with more items and equipment. If you have contact with second years – the best way to do this is joining your college’s First Year Whatsapp Group, which is often advertised on their website, or Instagram, or getting in contact with your college parents – please do ask them about the facilities.

Some people don’t have a kitchen. In this case, a JCR kitchen (or microwave) might be your only option for cooking. Again, basic utensils and plates would be your best bet here, as halls will become your best friend.

3. How often will you cook?

As a self-proclaimed picky-eater, eating in halls wasn’t always an option for me. Furthermore, depending on your college’s menu (check your college website or emails, every college distributes these differently), meals can get quite repetitive if you have certain dietary requirements (or even without, for that matter). Check your college menu, and get a sense of how often you’d have a meal there. However, if you’re a food-pessimist like me, please do also factor in how often you’ll use halls to socialise. As a bonus, the food might pleasantly surprise you.

Getting Used To Oxford

Three: Way too many toiletries.

It can be easy to haul over your entire bathroom cabinet over to university. But there's really only one thing to say about this: Tesco and Sainsbury's do exist in Oxford. So does Boots. So does delivery. You are not in the middle of nowhere. If you're on a budget, it can be sensible to bring replacements for more expensive things you think you'll use up across term, like shampoo, creams, or cleansers. Oxford prices can be a little steeper than usual, but remember that eight weeks is quite a short time. While packing for the vac, it's often just another hassle to pack away bottles that still feel heavy. Bear in mind that you'll also have to carry all of this back home.

Four: Books?

The question mark is there because this sounds incredibly counter-intuitive for a place that prides itself on its students 'reading' their degrees. Even more so, as I'm an English student (take a *hypothetical* shot every time I mention this.) For your first term, it's definitely useful to bring the items your tutors may have sent to you on a reading list, or similar. For some reason, though, I thought that amongst the chaos of my first term, I'd have time for 'casual reading'. I should preface that I'm not the type to read casually anyway (Oxford did not have *that* much influence over me.) Either way, the Oxford term is intense, and you will be hard pressed to find a moment where you aren't either studying, socialising, or just adventuring throughout the city. There are also these things in Oxford called libraries, and whether it was something I needed for work, or something to satisfy my natural curiosity on what a 'self-help' book even is, they're a great way to pick up a book and *not* have to take it back with you. Books are heavy. Every term, evaluate the essentials you'll need (perhaps you like to annotate your primary reading), and assure yourself that the library stands as a convenient (and much lighter) way to be prepared for work.

Getting Used To Oxford

Five: Your miscellaneous, fun, hobby-related items.

Another counter-intuitive-sounding header. It strikes me now that I think I am too boring to write this article. To the surprise of many at university, I am an English student that likes technology. That said, I did not need a laptop, a tablet, a 3DS, and a Nintendo Switch at university. More typically of my subject, I am also an English student who likes art, and as such, I brought many a pencil-case and sketchbook to university. By the end of term, these became my largest dust-collectors. Be not mistaken – Oxford did not take away my joy and whimsy. Indeed, it was the contrary. Oxford has so many opportunities to explore new things: sports clubs, Christ Church’s art room (email sarah.simblet@rsa.ox.ac.uk to get permission to use it), DJ and Film workshops... there simply wasn’t time for me to pick up my home-comforts. As much as Oxford is your home, it’s also a second home, with different opportunities – for most of us, much more than what we’re used to. Use the Freshers’ Fair to get a sense of the scope of what you could get stuck into, and please avoid risking dust and scratches on your precious technological devices as you needlessly transport them to and from university. The games will still be there when it’s time for the vac, which rolls around exceedingly fast.

A final word:

Unlike those ‘Top Ten Uni Essentials’ articles, I beg you to take this article with a massive sack of salt. Everyone approaches university differently, and there is no exhaustive list of what you should or shouldn’t bring to university. I’ve met people with entire PCs in their room, mountains of books and posters, a mini art studio, or zero cutlery apart from a plastic box of pesto pasta. I think the most useful advice is to remember, even if you’re an international student, is that while Oxford is different, it is not on a different planet. Bring what makes you feel comfortable, but remember that you’ll be home just as quickly as you arrived. A bit of empty space isn’t something to fear – Oxford is more than full of opportunities to fill it.

Things in Oxford

The Blue's Freshers' Recommendation:

Plush

Mya Sidhu



Image courtesy of Plush, used with permission.

Strobe lights, cheap drinks, and comfortable shoes. Clubbing, for many, is a staple of an Oxford Fresher's Week – and Plush guarantees the most colourful and affordable nights out available in the city.

Just off of Cornmarket Street, Frewin Court is the location of “Oxford's Premier LGBTQ+ Nightclub”, Plush. So, whatever your college address begins with, Plush is an easily accessible venue to spend your first clubbing experience at Oxford. Students, regardless of their identity, are welcomed by a seemingly non-descript staircase down into a night of multiple bars, atmospheric lighting, and music from some of the best DJs the UK has to offer.

Plush is open four days a week, tackling Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10.30pm to 3am – meaning that even if a heavily-procrastinated tutorial essay takes priority one day, Plush is still there when you need it most!

Things in Oxford

While Plush is open to everyone, it also provides spaces exclusive to queer students. As the name suggests, 'Tuesgay Skittles' at Plush offers a night for LGBTQ+ students to meet, drink, and dance to the beat of classic pop anthems every Tuesday during term time. The University's own LGBTQ+ Society runs a 'Tuesgays' event every week at a different college – which is the perfect place to meet people before you head down to the nightclub. With standard bars, or a specialised cocktail bar with luxurious VIP seating available to book online, Plush provides everything you need for the perfect night out – including a way to create connections with other LGBTQ+ students at the university.

However, having a great night out is just one side of the reality of being a student on a budget. How can you enjoy yourself without dwindling numbers in the back of your mind? Thankfully, Plush serves the solution in the form of 'Broke Thursdays' – their weekly event that prioritises affordable nights out over everything else. If you've already secured your tickets for Fresher's Week (or your college has done so for you) you can receive a Broke Thursdays Discount Card, which gives you free access to the club every Thursday before 12AM – a deal that, speaking as a second year, could help you save for much more than a pot noodle on a bad day.

Since 2010, the LGBTQ+ Bar and Nightclub has been serving the Oxford community in every capacity – whether it's providing you with a Vodka Redbull when you need it the most, or a 'WTF Friday' to close out a long week of work. Over the past five years, Plush has gone even further to support the wider community, donating over £30,000 to charities, community organisations, and student societies across Oxford. So, every ticket you buy not only helps you let out the stress of the week, but it also helps to support LGBTQIA+ groups, Mental Health projects, and Food Banks. And who doesn't want to support a good cause while dancing to Lady Gaga?

Compounded with their amazing drinks, kind staff, and great student deals, Plush truly earns its spot as The Oxford Blue's recommendation as one of the highlights of Oxford nightlife for Freshers.

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STEP 1: FIND YOUR COFFEE PLACE

Located in the heart of the city lies one of Oxford's most beloved independent speciality coffee shops. Exuding warmth and whimsy, JCT has been a core part of many students' university experience for over a decade, offering a safe, cosy space to meet, study, create, plan, laugh, cry and occasionally drink coffee.

Along with the cafe on the High Street, JCT roasts their many varieties of coffee in Osney Mead, boasting a gorgeous second cafe – a short and lovely walk along the river from town. Coffee beans can be bought in store or online, to cater for everyone's needs!

JCT hires staff not only on quality of service, but on quality of person too, making it undeniably one of the best (& friendliest) places to get your caffeine fix in the universe, maybe.

But of course we'd say all that, you'll have to come in and see for yourselves!

📷 @jerichocoffeetraders

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We advocate for policy change, improved research and awareness training, run survivor-centred spaces and events, and create effective and accessible resources. Our termly event, Still I Write, is an open mic night featuring spoken word, poetry and music, touching on themes of survivorship, trauma and allyship.

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Committee Positions opens periodically, with application information announced on our social media.

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Walking the Tightrope

Peter Heller

You've heard it all already. It goes something like this:

"What uni are you heading to?"

"Oxford..."

"I swear you guys don't have any fun. I swear it's all work."



For all the wonder of studying in this incredible city, it is true that the university forces you to work hard. While getting into Oxford means we are used to academic pressure, university comes with a whole new set of experiences that mean that the careful balance between academic work, CV building and socialising can be easily thrown off kilter.

After the beautiful madness of Freshers' Week, the tsunami starts: writing at least two essays a week, going to all your lectures and tutorials, playing sports, doing music or drama, spending time with friends, going out, writing for *The Oxford Blue*...

Now, there are some people who seemingly navigate all of this with ease, of whom I am eternally envious. Unfortunately, I was not one of them and as a result, large parts of my first term consisted of handing in essays late, missing nights out because I was writing said essays, and this noble sacrifice being acknowledged by stern dressings-down from my tutors.

This is not a pleasant situation to be in, but without great care, it can become all too easy to fall into this trap and miss out on parts of the famous "uni experience" and the approbation of your tutors.



So, what to do? The first thing is, as difficult as it is, not to procrastinate. If you have some work and you have some time, use it, even if the deadline isn't for a week. It's very easy to let tasks slip from your memory until you receive an angry email from your tutor asking where your translation or lab report is. While the poet Thom Gunn was being somewhat ironic when he wrote, "One is always nearer by not keeping still", this is remarkably sound advice in dealing with your various commitments. From personal experience, the worst thing you can do is let the scale of your tasks weigh down on you so much that you confine yourself to the comfort of your bed scrolling Instagram Reels, a prison that is harder to escape than Alcatraz.

You should also strive to deepen your friendship with Google Calendar (or an equivalent service). As soon as you're assigned some work, schedule time for it in your calendar so you don't only remember it the night before it's due. For me, this was the most transformative step – freeing up space in my brain so the pressure of all my tasks didn't force me into unwanted inaction. At the other extreme, some students see their work as their sole priority and as a result, miss out on many of the transformative experiences that Oxford has to offer. Working excessively can lead to severe stress and burnout and in the long term could be more detrimental than balancing work with other activities. Freshers' Week is designed to allow you to explore new opportunities and maximise your exposure to new people, so you should make the most of this week and 'put yourself out there' before your workload catches up with you. As well as the infamous Freshers' Week club nights, colleges also organise more relaxed daytime events to help you make friends and find your people.

I would also strongly recommend going to the Freshers' Fair and signing up to activities that pique your interest. There are myriad societies that cover even the most esoteric interests (there's even a toast society!), and having something unrelated to your degree that you can look forward to every week is a great way of getting through the term.

Your work should always be your central focus, and your tutors will not hesitate to remind you of this, but it is still crucial to keep busy in other areas. In doing so, you may find that your academic work becomes less of a burden. If you're too tired, go to sleep. If you've been stuck in your room for too long, go for a walk. If you feel like a zombie after four hours in the library, see your friends. Your tutors are very supportive if you're struggling academically and if you ever need to talk to someone, the University Counselling Service is always there to provide a helping hand.

Walking a tightrope is difficult and requires practice. Sometimes, you will fall and hurt yourself, but over time, you will learn how to stay upright. While it is tricky and requires dedication, striking a good balance is achievable and will help you both excel academically, while still making the most of everything this magical city has to offer.

The Blue's News section wants to be at the forefront of Oxford news – both inside and outside the university. If you dream of chasing the headline, attending free events, and learning more about the city you're studying in, then this is the place for you!

And if you ever have an insight, make sure to share it with us!

Freshers' Week and the Power of Peer Pressure

Madeleine Ling

Unless the BOP (Big Organised Party) juice these days is served spiked with electrolytes, I wouldn't describe the average Oxford Freshers' Week experience as a particularly salubrious period of health and wellness. Indeed, from the alcohol consumption and lack of sleep, to the potential anxiety and 'burnout' generated by constant social interaction, one's first week at university is not the most opportune occasion to balance your hormones and hit your macros. And to top it all off, of course, you will inevitably succumb to the worst cold you have ever caught in your life.

In days (and Freshers' Weeks) gone by, most students wouldn't have batted an eyelid at disrupting their routines for seven days of tightly scheduled fun; for **health obsessed Generation Z**, however, the excitement of the week may be marred by the obstacles it creates for gym-going and clean eating.

Certainly, such concern would be indicative of Gen Z's often obsessive relationship with health and wellness, an obsession characterised by record numbers of gym memberships, abstinence from drinking, a fondness for wearable fitness trackers, and an expensive supplement habit, all carried out with a well-thumbed dictionary of therapy speak terms at their disposal.

On the surface, this fixation with self-improvement is a cause worth supporting; greater health awareness and shifting cultural norms amongst young people has led to countless positive changes and health trends, including falling cancer and teenage pregnancy rates, as well as facilitating beneficial lifestyle practices like mindful nutrition and regular exercise. What's more, social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have made accessing educational health and wellness resources more straightforward than ever, with fibremaxxing and cortisol cocktails being just some examples of recent viral health trends.

The cruel irony, however, of this health and wellness mania, is that it's arguably starting to become somewhat unhealthy. A fixation with self-improvement leads to other areas of our lives becoming sidelined – and unsurprisingly, irksome things like a robust social life and fulfilling personal relationships are actually fairly crucial for good health too. Gen Z have sacrificed their own happiness in pursuit of becoming the 'best' possible versions of themselves, spending their evenings in the gym rather than the pub and 'setting their boundaries' by cancelling plans with friends.

The compulsion for self-betterment has inevitably engendered a culture of individualism and egocentricity, exacerbated by the endless self-comparison inflicted by social media use. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Gen Z and its health-conscious perfectionists are the loneliest generation, with university students in particular suffering from these feelings of isolation. The problem, in fact, is worryingly close to home – a study from earlier this year found that 1 in 3 Oxford students report 'worrying levels of anxiety or depression', and 1 in 7 would rate their mental health as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Ironically, these figures emerge in an era where conversations around mental health are seemingly less stigmatised than ever, fostering a culture of transparency and acceptance when it comes to discussing our own struggles. This necessary cultural shift, however, can at times be counter-productive. Strong mental health literacy is an important step to creating a more inclusive and effective society at dealing with mental health issues, and indeed, young people are especially aware of the importance of putting their needs first and setting their emotional boundaries. Obviously, this self-prioritisation can be a useful tool in combatting stress and anxiety, especially in an, at times, overwhelming environment like Freshers' Week; however, there is a danger in emphasising such importance in self-care that its fulfilment comes at the expense of making time for friends and peers, thus jeopardising the most potent antidote to poor mental health: our support networks. Ultimately, the prioritisation of the self leads to atomisation and isolation, generating a culture in which fulfilment is measured in alarmingly personal terms. In order to be 'well', we are told that community and connection are causing 'burnout' – that socialisation is a transgression of our 'boundaries'.

Of course, it would be unfair to criticise Gen Z and their habits without acknowledging the myriad of challenges and pressures that young people must contend with. In an era where the only certainty is uncertainty, obsession with physical optimisation can be a mechanism of leveraging some control in such unstable economic, social, and environmental times.

The nature of Freshers' Week, then, which provides an unrelenting programme of socialisation and interaction, serves as something of a rarity in our increasingly solitary times. Indeed, skills like making friends, interacting with different personalities, and being a good conversationalist might seem like the basics, but an unconditioned social muscle works much in the same way as an unconditioned bicep – it becomes weak. Freshers' Week is the perfect opportunity to free yourself from the comfortable cocoon of complacency and truly throw yourself into every opportunity. The words 'peer pressure' have always burdened a negative reputation, but I suggest that being influenced by others can bring about numerous hidden benefits. Clearly, no-one should feel pressured into engaging in behaviours they don't wish to partake in, whether it be drinking alcohol or changing your appearance; however, there is an undeniable positivity in being surrounded by a community who push the boundaries of your social comfort zone and encourage you to challenge the supremacy of your own self-betterment.

Needless to say, Freshers' Week (and life at Oxford in general) will on occasion be draining, and it's important to recognise that taking time to restore your social battery is nothing to be ashamed of. Being introverted can feel like an uphill struggle at the best of times, let alone in Freshers' Week when it seems like you can barely go five minutes without having to reintroduce yourself to a new group of strangers. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean that it can't be an enjoyable and rewarding experience: ensure to pick the events which correlate with your own tastes (and don't feel like you're missing out if you decide to avoid Oxford's famously average nightclubs), prioritise one-on-one conversations rather than large social gatherings, and remember that there will always others in the same boat, even if it seems like everyone is having the time of their lives.

Without a doubt, the most important part of Freshers' Week, and almost certainly your university experience overall, is developing and nurturing new friendships – friendships which will come to define your journey at Oxford and indeed your entire life. The tenets of any successful friendship – sacrifice, compromise, and selflessness – stand in total opposition to the principles espoused by many in health and wellness circles, where the cult of the self reigns supreme.

True personal growth comes from moments of vulnerability and social connection – from Getting It Wrong on the first club night, bonding with your tute partner during an essay crisis, and finding your crowd in the niches of student societies. This freshers' week, if the choice is between living the perfect life in isolation, or growing and developing imperfectly with your peers, then I think the answer is clear: get practising with your small talk.

Everyone has a voice, and each one deserves the chance to be heard!

At *The Blue*, we welcome a range of opinions on any topic, whether current news, personal experience, or anything else. If you're looking for a way to get into student journalism, this is an easy place to start.

How Learning About the World Made Me Feel Right At Home

Nancy Gittus

Hi, my name is Nancy, and first of all I'd love to welcome you to Oxford. I am genuinely so jealous of freshers; you all have the entirety of your Oxford lives stretching out gloriously ahead of you, and if I could, I would absolutely do my time again.

As a fresher you might have very clear ideas about things you'd like to get involved in, or you might have no clue. Either way, I'd encourage you to sign up for anything that piques your interest. I know you've probably heard it many times before, but your first year at university is truly a unique opportunity to give new things a go.

To introduce myself a little I'm reading History and French at Hertford (currently going into my third year) and I'll be Senior Editor for Global Affairs in Michaelmas 2026. I joined *The Oxford Blue* two terms ago as a Junior Editor for this section, and I've loved my time working with the team.

The wonderful thing about student journalism (particularly for a fresher) is that writing articles has no absolute time commitment. *The Oxford Blue* is probably one of Oxford's friendliest papers: the supportive and positive atmosphere at this paper makes it a great place to start, and by following *The Oxford Blue's* socials you can get access to the weekly commissions the paper advertises. Every week of term three new commissions for each section will be published. If any interest you, you can drop the Senior Editor a line saying you'd like to pick it up. This was how I first got into writing articles at university. I wrote a few culture articles on commission for other student papers and really enjoyed it. As a fresher, life can be very busy, trying to do a million things all at once. I found that writing on commission was a very useful way of trying out student journalism without having to make a definite commitment. You can try it once, an article might take a couple of evenings or so, and if it's not your thing, you're not stuck doing it for a term.

After doing a couple of internships in the course of my first year, by Hilary 2026, I'd become more set on journalism as a career. International journalism particularly interested me, which is why I applied to be a Junior Editor for Global Affairs at *The Oxford Blue*. Something I initially remarked about Global Affairs was just how open it is. In fact, I later realised that every section at the paper is welcoming and open to newcomers, and that there is absolutely no need for any kind of previous experience.

Even before I had officially joined the paper, I was given the opportunity to write my own fortnightly column, which I later called 'A Closer Look'. During my interview to become a Junior Editor I mentioned wanting to write articles about untold stories, either by looking at well-covered events (such as the World Cup) with a new perspective, or highlighting under-reported news stories. The energy and enthusiasm with which this idea was greeted blew me away the Editor-in-Chief at the time even suggested I could make it into a column right there and then, but I soon learned that this was no off kindness, my interviewers' positivity was indicative of the general supportive atmosphere cultivated at *The Oxford Blue*, more than anything else the team here wants its members to thrive.

At Global Affairs you have the opportunity to write about everything and anything. In my column, I've covered economics, business, politics, the environment, technology, history, sport, and health from countries as far apart as Sri Lanka to Morocco.

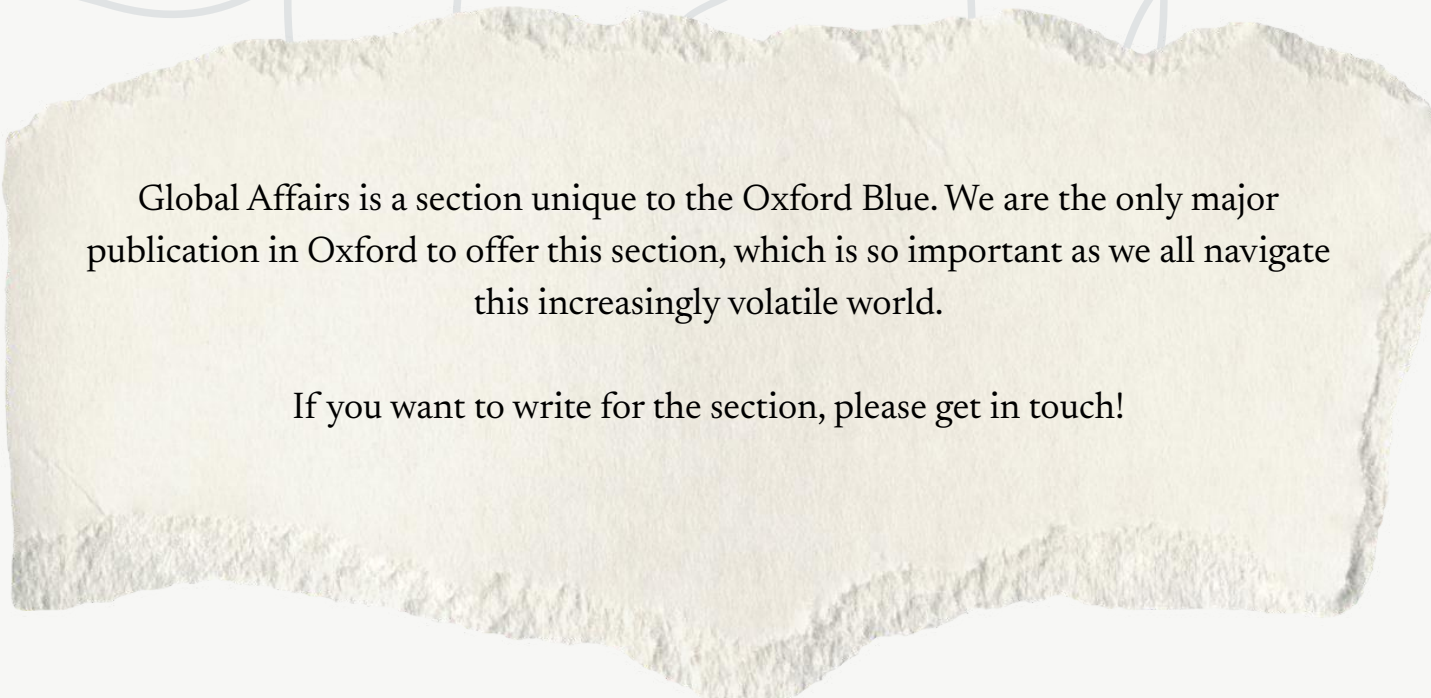
If you're interested in joining the team at Global Affairs, Junior Editors and the Senior Editor collaborate each week to produce a special publication, on top of our longer form articles, called Outside OX1. This publication contains shorter articles (around the length of this piece), where we provide three news pieces from the week to keep readers updated. When I first joined *The Blue* it was described to me as follows: "What's a story that you'd want someone to know about if they haven't been following the news this week"? That means probably not something that everyone is talking about, but perhaps a story which you spotted in the headlines which interested you, and/or an event you felt was important that people should know about. Some of the stories I've written about I would never have heard of otherwise, but I found digging into them really interesting. For example, I covered a trade deal struck between the EU and India, and the poisoning of Alexei Navalny.

Personally, I'd never really followed the news before I started as a Junior Editor at Global Affairs. I wanted to, but never made time. Checking the headlines as something I felt I should do on a semi-regular basis really helped me get into keeping up-to-date more often. Now I'm a regular follower of the BBC, FT, Economist, and Reuters. Also, quick note, that if you didn't already know, the University gives you free access to lots of these publications, you can just sign straight in with your university email address and password.

Over time, writing for Global Affairs has made me realise just how connected the world really is. It's brought home to me that decisions on one side of the world can cause rippling effects somewhere thousands of miles away, in a sector that is seemingly unrelated. This theme is definitely something I'm planning to dig into more in my future articles for the paper.

So that's that. Welcome to Oxford, enjoy it. And, I hope, welcome to *The Oxford Blue*. I can't wait to work with some of you in the terms to come! If you have any questions about *The Blue*, Global Affairs, Oxford, History and/or French or are in need of café recommendations please feel free to get in touch!

All the best, and enjoy Freshers' Week!



Global Affairs is a section unique to the Oxford Blue. We are the only major publication in Oxford to offer this section, which is so important as we all navigate this increasingly volatile world.

If you want to write for the section, please get in touch!

NEW SECTION

Our sport section now stands entirely alone, giving you the chance to write about your favourite sporting interests!

Sport

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From Aikido to Octopush - an Unconventional A-Z of Oxford's Sports

Thomas Yates

In the first tutor meeting we had as incoming historians, we were told not to get sucked into sports. The training, travel, and recovery would add up to a “colossal waste of time.” It’s a good thing that I don’t listen.

Oxford is not only a top-class city for a student; it has fabulous facilities for athletes. The city has **nearly 120 publicly accessible playing pitches** for a variety of sports. Many colleges have their own onsite gym, and access to sports grounds (either their own or shared). The University’s Iffley Road Sports Centre boasts two sports halls, three gyms, and a swimming pool – and that’s without even mentioning the athletics track, at which Sir Roger Bannister ran the first four-minute mile. University Parks is home to rugby, cricket, lacrosse, hockey, and more throughout the year.

Every sport you can think of is played at Oxford. But what about the sports you can’t think of? If you want to pick up a sport where everyone is a beginner, or try something that you genuinely couldn’t play anywhere else, then look no further!

Unusual Martial Arts

Beyond Judo and Karate, there's still plenty of combat sports to try. The philosophy behind the lesser-known sport of Aikido is one of non-violence. The key is not to launch an attack yourself, but to use your opponent's momentum against them; some would argue that it is technically not a sport at all. Shorinji Kempo exploits pressure points on the body, allowing smaller fighters to fairly take on people much bigger in stature.

In Capoeira, music and sport blend as players of the berimbau, gourds with bows attached, set the tempo for the fighters in the middle.



A match of Kendo underway. Image credit to Harald Hofer, licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Austria](#) license.

Is hand-to-hand combat too mainstream for you? Look no further than Kendo, which equips fighters with a bamboo sword (I have visions of that swordplay game from Wii Sports, but it's probably much more disciplined). It's a loud one, too, as strikes must be accompanied by kiai, a shout announcing your intended target.

Taking Flight

Want a change from standing on your own two feet? **Oxford University Gliding Club** offers a chance to take to the skies at 70 miles an hour. Scoring is based on how long you can fly for, and how high you can climb. Or you can take a slightly less gentle descent and check out **Oxford Skydiving Club**.



A point is scored in a Quadball match between Oxford and Cambridge. Image credit to Thomas Yates

...In a more metaphorical sense, you can also take flight in Quadball, which is based on Quidditch, the sport played on broomsticks in Harry Potter. Players must keep hold of their 'broomstick' at all times, and work to throw the 'quaffle' (a volleyball) through the other team's hoops whilst avoiding their 'bludgers' (dodgeballs). After a while, the 'golden snitch' (an impartial referee wearing a tag) enters the pitch and must be caught to win the game. Full-contact and mixed gender, the sport is a common sight out on University Parks, where training happens twice a week.

In Clay Pigeon Shooting, saucer-shaped targets are launched into the air to be brought down by your shotgun. It originated near the beginning of the 20th century as an alternative to the shooting of real birds that was popular amongst the British upper class.

Into the Depths



Players battle for control of the puck in Octopush. Image credit to Wouss at Dutch Wikipedia, licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 Generic](#) license.

How about heading underwater with Octopush? You'll have to push a puck along the bottom of a swimming pool with a small stick, in a mixed gender team of six. Bring high lung capacity! Or maybe you'll want to head out to the open seas with the [Oxford University Underwater Exploration Group](#), which teaches members how to SCUBA dive. [Oxford University Cave Club](#) is another possibility for explorers who wish to get slightly less drenched.

Sports So Random I Couldn't Think of a Fitting Subtitle to Group Them All Together

Want to play a sport that you can pretend is history revision? Real Tennis is tennis as played according to King Henry VIII's rules. Players face off on an asymmetrical indoor court with sloping roofs and an angled wall called the 'tambour' which puts unpredictable spin on the handmade balls that are re-covered with cloth each week.

Rugby Fives isn't played with five players and has nothing to do with rugby. Instead, you slap a ball as hard as you can against a wall so that your opponents can't return it (think squash but without racquets).

Eton Fives is almost identical, but is played on an unusual court. On the left is a buttress which sticks out into the playing area, and the playing surface isn't completely level, with a step between the front and back, simulating the layout of the chapel at Eton, the school where the game was first played.



A shot taken in Korfball. Image credit to Marco Spelten, licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International](#) license.

Last, but not least, the Dutch sport of Korfball draws from Netball, but players aren't allowed to shoot if they're being defended by an opponent, which reduces the importance of height, and promotes free-flowing passes through the hands to players in open space.

It's doubtless that there are other sports that deserve mention, including Oxford's traditional punting and croquet, which are great for casual fun with friends in Trinity. To check out a thorough list of University-affiliated competitive sports at Oxford, have a look [here](#) – though many sporting societies exist beyond this. Keep your eyes peeled at the Freshers' Fair, and have a good scroll through Facebook and Instagram. Getting stuck into a niche sport can be great – there's no pressure to be any good at the start, and the ascent to the top levels of the sport can be quick, if that's what you want to do (I went from beginner Quadballer in October to international player in July!). Far from being a waste of time, sport has immense proven physical and mental benefits, while most sports at Oxford hold regular socials and crewdates (joint socials where you get to meet a new society through games and challenges). Don't let your tutors hold you back!

A brand new section, ready for brand new ideas!

This term, we've finally separated News and Sport, giving our Sport section the chance to thrive. But we need you! If you're someone who's interested in sport (whether playing or watching), has thoughts on the industry, or just enjoys reviewing matches, then this is definitely the place for you. Anything sport-related goes!

If this sounds like a role that interests you, make sure to apply to our rolling Junior Editor applications to get involved!



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Men's Vs Harlequins
30th October (7.15pm KO)
£5 Student ticket

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Nature & Nurture: Finding Home in Oxford

Jemima Dinsley

Hi everyone! I'm Jemima, a third-year Earth Scientist at St Anne's College, and I will be your Senior Editor for the Environment Section of *The Oxford Blue* for Michaelmas 2026!

When I first came to Oxford, it felt like a world apart from home. I'm from a small rural village in north Northumberland, where there is no public transport and farmland stretching for miles. The endless beaches and dark nights were things I took for granted. Although anyone who grew up in a city might say Oxford is small, to me it felt huge--not just literally, but in its grandeur too. But I soon learnt that it is much smaller than it first appears. You get to know people from every college, the short terms make it hard to miss home for too long and the experiences you have will be unforgettable.

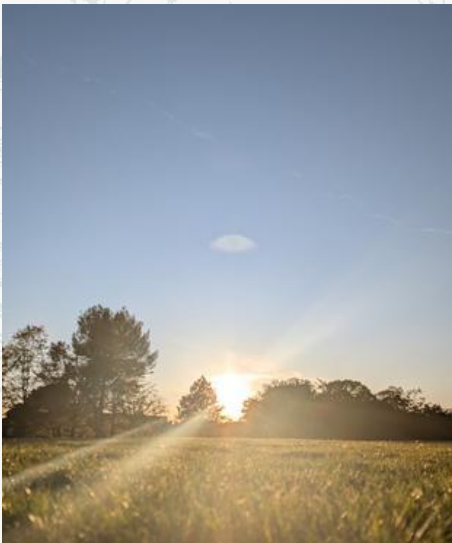
Nature: The Beauty Beyond the Buildings

As the Environment Editor, you may assume that I have explored all the nature there is around Oxford, and to an extent, you'd be right. One of the ways I coped with missing home was exploring the green spaces in and around the city, so sharing these with you is the least I can do. Christ Church Meadow in central Oxford is an obvious place to start. Home to the boathouses (for those who are particularly keen to try rowing) along with tall willow trees and cows, it has a surprising sense of distance from the rest of the city despite its close proximity to the High Street. It's especially beautiful in summer, when it is filled with picnics and tourists coming to marvel at Christ Church itself.



Entrance to Christ Church Meadow.
Image Credit: Noah Allerton

Port Meadow, in north-west Oxford, is another favourite. The Thames runs through it, which you can swim in (water quality dependent), and the meadow itself is filled with wildlife. Both of these are large spaces that provide a quiet break from the chaotic terms, and I'd encourage you to explore them as much as possible.



A University Parks Sunset. Image Credit: Noah Allerton

University Parks is another green space that connects St Anne's College (oops, biased), Lady Margaret Hall, and the University Science Area (along with other colleges), and also allows you to walk across to east Oxford through the parks. This highlights a lovely thing about Oxford—you are never too far from an escape into nature. These are some of the main green spaces in Oxford, but I can't go without mentioning the Oxford Botanic Garden, South Park, and the Thames Path.

An underappreciated green space that almost all colleges have is the quad. A somewhat old-fashioned concept, though a lovely space. Most colleges ban people from walking on the grass in the autumn to restore it, but in summer it's an incredible social space, filled with clusters of people taking breaks from revision for finals, or soaking up the warm weather. Even in Michaelmas, when the weather is often rainy and dark, the pockets of nature can bring a sense of calm, reminding you that the library walls don't confine you—or at least that's how I feel.



Lincoln College Grove Quad in Summer.
Image Credit: Noah Allerton

Nurture: Creating a Personal Retreat

Another thing that kept me grounded during my first year was room decorations. At Oxford, most colleges require you to move out completely at the end of every term, a concept that is quite daunting considering the short length of each term. Having to pack up your room, and in a way, your personality with it, can feel surprisingly strange. However, this shouldn't stop you from decorating your room to its fullest. I personally enjoyed putting up posters of places I've visited and filling my room with fake plants (very environment-coded I know).

The sustainability advocate in me would suggest only buying decorations you know you'll reuse, that are easy to pack, or you genuinely need. As you'll be living in college accommodation for nine terms (or more if your course is longer than three years), you don't want to throw away a room's worth of decorations every term. Buy second hand where possible (tapestries, lights etc) as it can save both money and waste. And bring LOTS of blankets. Old Oxford buildings tend to get cold very easily, and you might not have control over the radiator in your room.

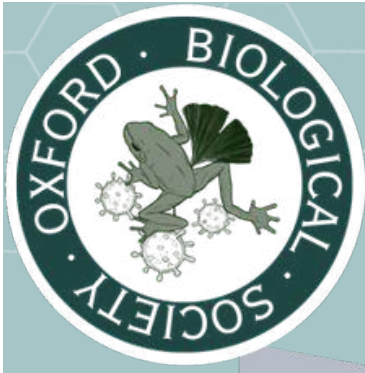
Coming to Oxford can be extremely daunting, especially if you arrive from somewhere completely different. Find places that make you feel grounded, whether that's a walk through a meadow, sitting in your college quad, cosying up in the endless libraries, or simply making your room feel a bit more like home. Oxford may feel like a completely different world when you arrive, but it doesn't take long to find your own place.



Our Environment section is one of the best retreats for STEM-loving students who want a break from essays on the ins and outs of different flower species (or adjacent).

This section offers the ability to talk about the world at possibly as large a scale as you can get – so get involved, no matter what you study!

See Page 93 on ‘Demystifying Student Journalism’ to see how to join us, and what it could be like!



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The Oxford Sanskrit Society is a friendly and welcoming community dedicated to furthering the study of Sanskrit at Oxford. We aim to promote the active use of the language through play performances, spoken Sanskrit classes, joint reading sessions, socials and more. Last year, we brought Sanskrit literature to life through our performance of *Mattavilāsa* and this year we look forward to staging Kālidāsa's celebrated drama *Śākuntala*. Whether you are a complete beginner, have studied Sanskrit before, or simply have an interest in Sanskrit literature and culture, everyone is welcome. Come along and get involved in our society throughout the year!



The Freshers' Guide to Culture at Oxford!

Nancy Pierre and Natalie Perera

Hi Freshers! We hope you've had a lovely summer and are looking forward to arriving in Oxford.

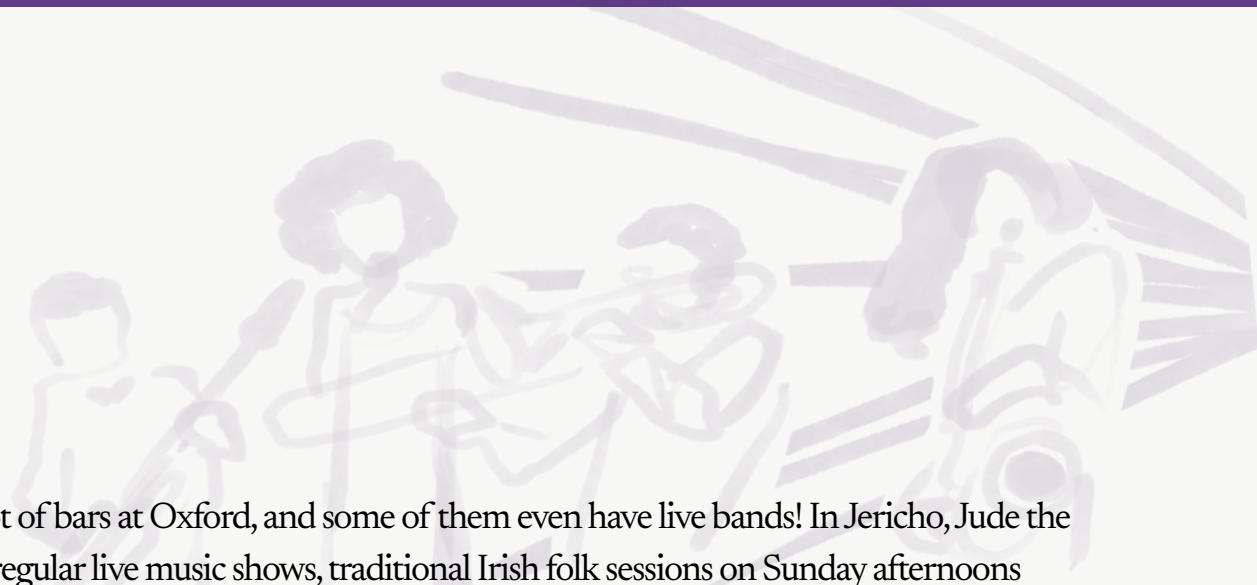
We're Nancy and Natalie, the Senior Editors of the Culture section at The Oxford Blue, and we've put together a guide to Oxford's cultural scene. From music and fashion to literature and art, here's our introduction to some of the places, events, and opportunities worth knowing about as you begin your first year!

Music

Music is such a prominent cultural aspect at Oxford, and the most impressive thing about it is the sheer scale; from small colleges to large university-wide events, there are numerous musical opportunities every single week!

For orchestral people, there are plenty of university-wide orchestras to be a part of, most of which are supported by Oxford University Music Society (OUMS), such as Oxford University Orchestra (OUO), Oxford University Philharmonia (OUPhil), Oxford University Jazz Orchestra (OUJO), and more! Some of these orchestras require you to audition, so be sure to check out the OUMS website for more details: <https://www.oums.co.uk/>

Outside the orchestras within the OUMS, there is also the Turl Street Orchestra, a laid-back non-audition university-wide orchestra. Rehearsals are usually on Friday evenings, and they have a concert once a term. For more details, you can email them at: turlstreetorchestra@maillist.ox.ac.uk



There are a lot of bars at Oxford, and some of them even have live bands! In Jericho, Jude the Obscure has regular live music shows, traditional Irish folk sessions on Sunday afternoons (typically 2 - 5pm), and weekly pub quizzes on Mondays. The Bear Inn hosts regular live music events, but it's mainly known for its jazz nights on Tuesday evenings from 8 - 10pm. All you need to do is show up!

Depending on which college you're at, there can be lots of opportunities such as chapel choirs, music societies, and college bars. Some colleges have chapel choirs where it's non-audition and anyone can join regardless of which college you're at – if you search '[name of college] college chapel choir' on Instagram, you can usually find them there! One of the most prominent and well known music societies at Oxford is Jesus College Music Society, where they host numerous events in their fantastic bar - make sure to check them out on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/jesuscollegemusicsoc/>.

Open mic nights are quite popular too, and they're hosted by a lot of societies both within college and university-wide, such as the African & Caribbean Society (ACS). ACS also has a gospel choir called ASEDA, details of which are on Instagram too:

<https://www.instagram.com/asedagospelchoir/>.

Lastly, dance is also popular at Oxford within Equinox and Oxford Freestyle Dance Community. These cover many different styles of dance, and have free open classes given by other students. Classes like these have varying styles and levels, taking place throughout the year. Be sure to follow these accounts on Instagram to find out more!

Clubs

One of the things at the forefront of most fresher's minds in Freshers' Week is clubbing, so here's a little about Oxford's unique clubbing scene! Oxford has five main clubs – Bridge, Plush, TVC (The Varsity Club), O2, and Bully (The Bullingdon) - which each have their own character and reputation. After the first few weeks of Michaelmas, the term 'TNB' (Thursday Night Bridge) will become notorious, due to their themed club nights, ranging from Cowboy nights (with free cowboy hats) to their Traffic Light Party. Bridge, Plush, and TVC are the clubs that are closer to central Oxford, and so the easiest to get to for a spontaneous night out. You will almost definitely see everyone you've ever met, and it is a great excuse to hear some early 2000s music (aka, 'white girl bangers'), while meeting so many new people.

Especially in Fresher's Week and throughout Michaelmas, Oxford clubbing becomes such a bonding experience. From the initial excitement of Freshers' club nights, to the walk home, and the inevitable pit stop at one of the local kebab vans. The proximity of the clubs to all the colleges makes this something much more entwined in Oxford life, as one call/text from a friend can end in a night out in numerous clubs, bars, and college JCRs.

Even so, O2 and Bully are the clubs down in Cowley, somewhat further from many colleges. Yet, from many people, I have been told that these are their favourite clubs - and I don't disagree. Like Bridge, they also have themed nights, and O2 is most famous for its monthly Indie Fridays night. O2 more resembles a concert venue, comparatively bigger than other Oxford clubs, and (particularly in Freshers' Week) is a place where Oxford and Oxford Brookes' club nights overlap. Meanwhile, Bully is another Cowley club that is smaller, but still also puts on some great nights. A personal favourite of mine is Blvcklisted, which plays Afrobeats and HipHop music, but other big nights include 70s Electric Boogaloo and Bully Boiler Room. These five clubs are the primary clubs in Oxford, and the most likely venues for Freshers' Week clubbing - all of which come with college discounts. College Entz reps (and many society Entz reps) can guarantee discounts on the already cheap prices of these club nights. My advice to you is be sure to follow your college Entz on Instagram (as well as the Instagram/Whatsapp group chats of societies you join) for discounted tickets!

Many clubs are notorious for different reasons, which I am sure your college parents will be more than happy to share. That said, everyone has different experiences and favourite nights out, and I strongly recommend trying as many as you can to discover your own! You will meet so many people, can dress up to so many themes, and have so many spontaneous and random stories as a result!

Art

With all its traditions and historical architecture, Oxford is a very modern and artsy place, and this is because of the university arts scene. From the outset, Oxford is home to much traditional art and history in the Ashmolean Museum, Natural History Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, and even within the older colleges themselves. However, the arts scene is so unique in the way that this history combines with the modern arts of Oxford students. The most prominent of these are the arts magazines – such as *Industry* and *Cuntry Living*. These are the hubs of Oxford's visual arts, with many one of a kind themes and writing styles, alongside paintings, graphics, and designs. They are open for all students to input their own creative ideas, and take part in their photo shoots, so I highly recommend checking out the details for this on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cun4rylivingzine/>, <https://www.instagram.com/industryoxford/>.

More than this, there are many different art societies, with many opportunities, from Pottery Soc and Art Soc's many events throughout the terms (such as Paint your College Spouse, Life Drawing, Finger Puppets, and other socials). These go hand in hand with college arts events, as each college has an Arts Rep, who puts on activities throughout the year. At my college, they have done things such as exhibitions, allowing students to create and display their work. These also have Instagram pages, which I encourage you to keep an eye on!

The arts at Oxford is everywhere, in its most casual and professional forms, whether the aim is a stress relief from the infamous 5th Week Blues and occasionally intense workload, or whether the aim is to master your craft – whatever it may be. So, give it a try!

Fashion

While the Oxford stereotype would suggest all students are in button-downs and bowties (or, if you watched 'My Oxford Year', that we wear subfusc, constantly), Oxford is full of fashionable people, with myriad styles. You will see all personal styles in the city – grunge, alt, goth, clean girl aesthetic, among others, and the home for this stylistic plurality is Fashion Soc (<https://www.instagram.com/oxfashionsoc/>). They put on some truly great events, and open doors for trying new styles of dress and learning about fashion itself. Through their socials, modelling opportunities, runways, and the famous fashion show, they give Oxford students a place to express and show off their fantastic dress sense.

On this, they host workshops and talks on the history of fashion, or have talks by prominent members of the fashion industry (last term, hosting Vogue editor Julia Hobbs, and PR entrepreneur Daisy Hoppen). However, the fashion scene goes beyond Fashion Soc into student journalism, who can share thoughts on Fashion Soc talks, and on pop culture in general. We have done this here at *The Oxford Blue*, with pieces on public opinion on big fashion events, such as the Met Gala, shared on our Instagram page.

At any event – nights out, formals, society events, or even lectures – everyone has the opportunity to express their personal style, and they absolutely take it. Oxford is a welcoming place for any kind of style, with a diversity that mixes the old city with the modern lifestyle and expression of its student population!

Literature and Journalism

The biggest thing I appreciate about Oxford is that it provides plenty of ways for you to express your opinion. Written opinions, for example, can not only manifest in Oxford Writing Society and their weekly events (<https://www.instagram.com/oxford.writing.society/>), but also finds a comfortable home in student magazines and journalism.

For example, *Turl Street Magazine*, *Industry magazine*, *ISIS magazine*, and *The Oxford Scientist* all accept submissions of your own work – just make sure to check their social media and maybe even send a DM to know when they take submissions.

The Cherwell, *The Oxford Student*, and *The Oxford Blue* are the three main student newspapers in Oxford, where you can email and submit a piece of written work and have it published online and/or in-print. Before the start of every term, these newspapers open editorial positions, where you can apply to be an editor of a section. This involves reading over and checking other people's work, as well as writing a few articles of your own!

Which brings me onto *The Oxford Blue*. At *The Blue*, the culture section aims to cover all aspects of culture, ranging from music and art to fashion and film. We particularly focus on reviewing student theatre productions, shining a well-deserved light on the talented students that have worked so hard to create a magnificent performance.

Throughout the newspaper overall, there is a huge emphasis on your opinion; we want to know what your opinion is. In the culture section, we want to learn from you and read about the cultural aspects that intrigue you. *The Oxford Blue* has been a place where both Nancy and I have really developed our editing skills and have met great people that we probably wouldn't have encountered otherwise. But above all, *The Blue* is inclusive and welcoming, and it's the reason why we're both here. We very much encourage you to write for us and apply to be a Junior Editor. Follow us on Instagram to know when Junior Editor applications are open and we really hope to hear from you soon! <https://www.instagram.com/theoxfordblue/>

Other student journalism and writing opportunities include the Oxford Poetry Society (<https://www.instagram.com/opsox/>) and the Oxford Review of Books (<https://www.instagram.com/oxfordreviewofbooks/>). Also, The Oxford Linguist is a unique magazine in that you can write a piece in any language you want without translation – truly one of a kind! <https://theoxfordlinguist.weebly.com/>

Theatre

On the topic of student journalism, there are many opportunities to review student theatre, since there is so much taking place. OUDS (Oxford University Drama Society) is the hub for all student drama at Oxford, with so many productions on each term, and entry from the most beginner level, to the most experienced, in both cast and crew. Everyone is welcome, no matter their ability, or theatrical passion – no matter how it could range from Shakespeare plays, to modern musicals, and cultural projects.

These begin taking place from early in Michaelmas, in which freshers are able to join and immerse themselves in student drama. Nonetheless, it is Trinity term that hosts the most theatrical productions. Due to the nice weather, and the time for auditions and rehearsals in previous terms, the summer term at Oxford consists of endless productions, of which there will always be something to interest everyone. Whether it be a chance to be a part of, or see a production that you've always wanted to, or even watch your friends pursue their passions, Oxford theatre is always a great experience. And, in Trinity, the outdoor productions are definitely worth a trip, from the incredible atmosphere, and the creative methods of lighting, sound, and set decor.

There are a couple of theatre houses in Oxford, but the most prominent ones are the Oxford Playhouse and the Burton Taylor Studio. They have a lot of student theatre productions almost every week so if you check out their website, you can see what's going on throughout the term!

If you want to know more, feel free to check out OUDS social media [<https://www.instagram.com/ouds/>], or some of our theatre reviews on [<https://theoxfordblue.co.uk/category/culture/>].

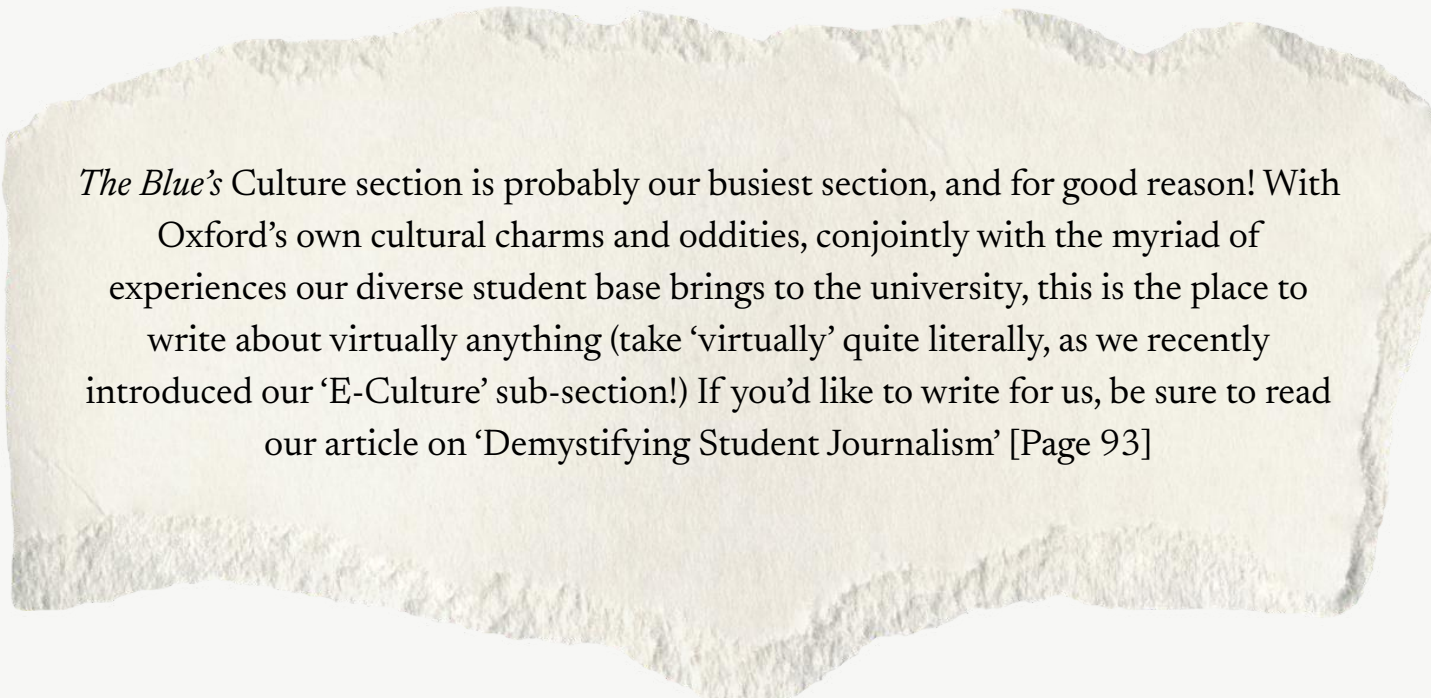
Film

There are plenty of ways for you to engage with film during your time at Oxford. The two main societies for it are the Oxford University Filmmaking Foundation (<https://www.instagram.com/ouff.ox/>) and the Oxford University International Film Society (<https://www.instagram.com/oxinternationalfilmsoc/>), both of which host regular weekly events.

Apart from that, there's also Magdalen Movie Mondays, where every Monday, Magdalen hosts movie screenings and other events such as talks. Although you need to book a ticket in advance, it's completely free and welcome to all regardless of college!

<https://www.magd.ox.ac.uk/magdalen-monday-movies/>

That's it from us for now! If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email us at natalie.perera@lincoln.ox.ac.uk and nancy.pierre@st-annes.ox.ac.uk. We hope you have a lovely Freshers' week and we hope to read your junior editor applications soon!



The Blue's Culture section is probably our busiest section, and for good reason! With Oxford's own cultural charms and oddities, conjointly with the myriad of experiences our diverse student base brings to the university, this is the place to write about virtually anything (take 'virtually' quite literally, as we recently introduced our 'E-Culture' sub-section!) If you'd like to write for us, be sure to read our article on 'Demystifying Student Journalism' [Page 93]

Illustrations by Mya Sidhu.

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What Kind of Oxford Student Will You Be?

Molly Finch

Answer each of these questions and tally your options to find out the type of Oxford student you'll be!

What is your preferred drink in the morning?

- a) Coffee, coffee, coffee, I need my caffeine!
- b) Tea
- c) Orange juice
- d) Water

Where would you most like to be right now?

- a) Museum
- b) Garden
- c) Near water
- d) Cinema

What is your favourite food?

- a) Chocolate
- b) Pasta
- c) Chips
- d) Cake

What is your favourite flower?

- a) Orchid
- b) Sunflower
- c) Lily
- d) Rose

What is your preferred colour to wear?

- a) Black
- b) Green
- c) Orange
- d) Pink

What is your preferred alcoholic or non-alcoholic version of a beverage?

- a) Dark and Stormy
- b) Bloody Mary
- c) Beer
- d) Sex on the beach

Results:

Mostly As

You will take a trip to the Radcliffe Camera and not care about the echoes. Blackwells and The Ashmolean will be your haunts, whilst at night you will be found drinking at a cocktail bar. You will be a late-night, last-minute procrastinator in your college library and a late riser in the day so you roll into brunch with five minutes to spare.

Mostly Bs

You will most likely be found in the botanical gardens learning the name of the plants there. The Science Museum would take you a while to go round, and homemade cocktails are your drink of preference. The Japanese Library will be your study spot of choice in the early morning.



Mostly Cs

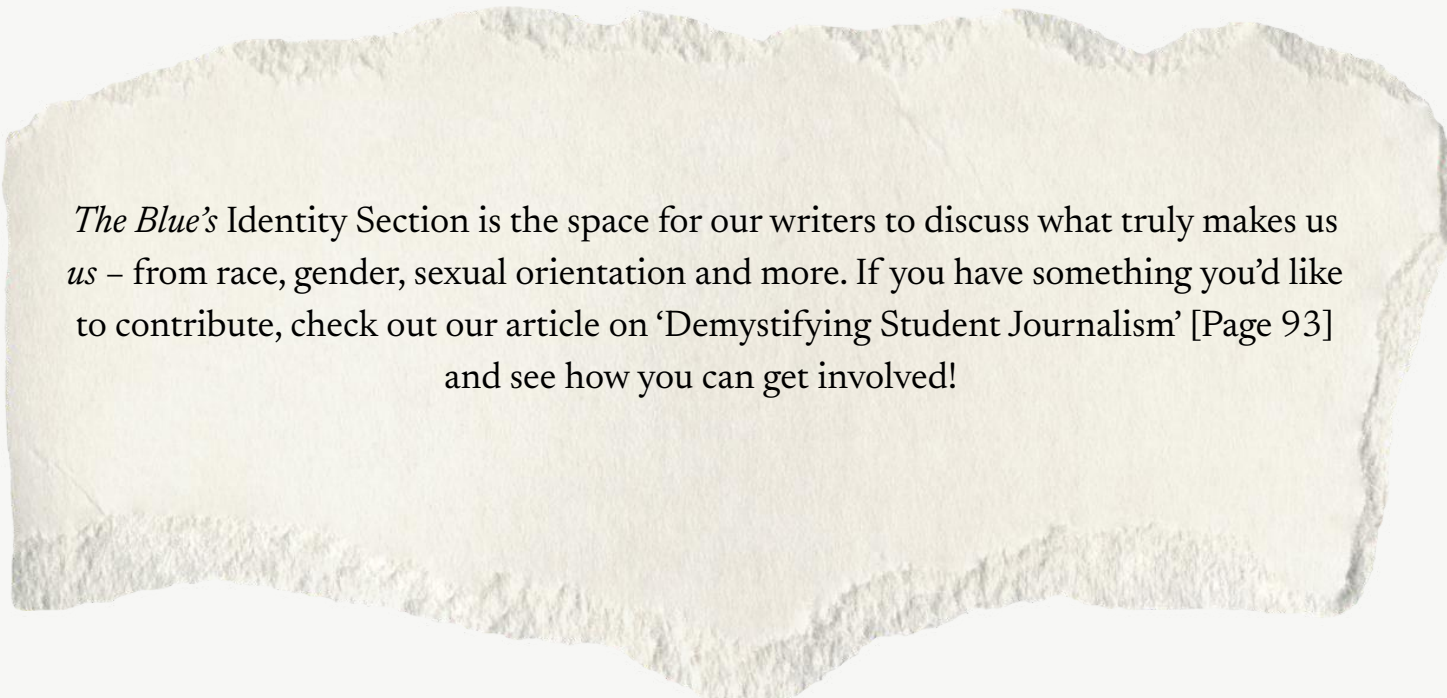
You will most likely be found in the pub, but on your days off from work, you will adventure out to Port Meadow to enjoy the perfect scenery. Matcha from a coffee shop in Jericho will be your go-to before you hit the Taylorian. You have probably already joined the rowing team.

Mostly Ds

You love a night in the club – any club you can convince your friends to go to. Sunbathing hungover in the fellow's garden will be your activity on a Sunday. Your library of choice will be a trip to the Glink (Gladstone Link) because being locked underground is the best way that you study. You don't even have to be drunk to do karaoke.

Mostly mixed

You are a sociable student and every time you leave your college you find someone you know. Clubbing is great but you would much prefer to be at a pub like the King's Arms. Whenever someone needs to know directions, you will know where to go because you love exploring Oxford and walking around all the little alleys. Your favorite library will without a doubt be the Weston Library.



The Blue's Identity Section is the space for our writers to discuss what truly makes us *us* – from race, gender, sexual orientation and more. If you have something you'd like to contribute, check out our article on 'Demystifying Student Journalism' [Page 93] and see how you can get involved!

For the next cohort: A letter to Muslim Freshers

Saba Ahmadzadeh Noughani

“Let me make this very clear to you, [...] You are a minority in this world and you will be a minority in Oxford”.

Those were the words said to me by my then sixth form headteacher. Based on her tone, expression, other interactions, and our wider conversation, it was clear that this statement was one of many intimidation tactics, and intended as a threat. To all Muslim students reading, I write this because it is the Oxford welcome I wish I had received.

My time at Oxford University started directly after a summer of race riots, and two years into a live-streamed genocide in Gaza. It was important for me to address this cohort of freshers who, for those who have not taken gap years, will remember sitting your SATS exams the same year that ‘Punish a Muslim’ day was established. Now, you are starting Oxford University after two “Unite the Kingdom” rallies, a newly founded Reform UK society, and at a time where it seems the Oxford Union is most obsessed with our faith.

I want to start by acknowledging that there will always be people who will be confused, or even abnormally impressed by our presence here. There will always be those who look at our achievements with suspicion, feel irritated by our successes, and attempt to find reasons to discredit, downplay, and belittle us and our hard work. The most painful and extreme example of this is the digital lynching and subsequent tragic passing of Professor Jason Arday.

My first advice therefore is to never assure anyone that you belong here or worked just as hard. It is truly enough that you know and that your acceptance to Oxford speaks for itself. Equally, I beg of you to not downplay your achievements either, because we already have enough people underestimating us.

Not only do we have people underestimating us, but others wanting us to prove ourselves. This goes for many things, including proving our innocence. Recent debates at the Oxford Union, I am ashamed to admit, including those organised by Muslim students, have attempted to do exactly this. My second advice therefore, is never to put yourself in a position where you are subjected to prove your innocence nor humanity.

Before I encourage every one of you to debate, I want you to understand exactly what a debate is. A debate must consist of two valid sides, answering a legitimate question.

I very much ask you to debate, but never be fooled into answering illegitimate questions that put our humanity or faith on trial. We must never, and should never be expected to, debate our existence, struggles, survivals, dignity or humanity. Before we 'debate' anything, we must first accept that there are two valid sides answering or giving perspective to a legitimate question. Debate, but never degrade yourself by debating your humanity.

During our time at university, we will engage with many we disagree with, and I also simply advise that we have more self respect than to entertain, and invite and give a platform to people who have built their identities and careers around dehumanising us. Many times, conversing with certain people is also in itself another form of disrespecting ourselves.

To use the most recent example, we must have more self respect than to humiliate ourselves by begging others to not be "suspicious" of us. To stand in the Oxford Union, in front of men who have incited pogroms against us, and assure them that they should not be "suspicious" of us, is, to say the least, a humiliation ritual. Or to debate whether, not religious law in general, but instead our faith specifically, is compatible with democracy, is to put our faith on trial in a way that other faiths never have, and never would be.

When attending some Oxford Union debates, where I have felt that speakers are disrespecting my faith, race, or background, as a visibly-Muslim woman, I leave. I do not entertain or respect them with my presence by sitting there as they repeat talking points, stereotypes, or conspiracies. A minority of Muslims, however, entertain and contribute to the hate against them. I wrote this section to simply say: do not be such a person. No attention, position (even an Oxford Union presidency) or any other “hallowed hall” is worth this. We must have enough self respect to not be desperate for seats at these tables.

But as you do attempt to establish yourself in certain environments, or simply settle in, I also want you to know that you do not need to compromise your faith.

During my second day of Fresher’s Week, I had asked to skip the freshers formal dinner, due to alcohol being served. (like many Muslims, I also do not sit at a table where others are drinking or alcohol is being served). I subsequently found myself in quite a lengthy back and forth email thread. I kept explaining that I simply do not sit on a table with alcohol and would have to politely excuse myself when alcohol was served. It was no doubt an uncomfortable position to be in, at times even awkward to explain, but ultimately tutors quickly understood that this decision was a religious boundary, and both them and SU freshers officers showed the utmost respect and care towards me.

During Freshers’ Week, I also declined many handshakes (like observant Orthodox Jews, many Muslims often also refuse handshakes with people of the opposite gender to maintain religious modesty). Not one person made me feel awkward after I explained it was due to religious reasons. Some were curious, but always respectful.

But perhaps moments I will always remember were when I joined some society committees as a newsletter officer or marketing officer, and soon realised that I would need to email about pub socials, pub quizzes, and other events with alcohol. My first reaction was one of panic, worry, and frustration. At first, I did not know how to explain that I couldn't do it, especially to those with a different perspective and experience of life to myself. I thought that if I explained that from a religious perspective, this is considered advertising or promoting alcohol, my fellow committee members may be confused or argue otherwise. But I could not have been more wrong. Every single president in these societies was understanding, empathetic and respectful.

Yet I can also list countless examples of times where people at this university have made insulting and ignorant comments, rooted in racism and anti-Muslim hostility, towards me and those from a similar background to myself. I made sure to mention those positive anecdotal instances however, to simply urge us to not be quick to make unfair assumptions that others may not always understand, and to not make any compromises when it comes to our values, faith and lifestyle.

Every time we decline a handshake, a seat at a table where alcohol is served, or any other decision rooted in valuing our boundaries and faith, we make it easier for the next cohort to do the same.

May you enjoy every second of the next few years. May you never bypass the opportunities that only Oxford provides. May you be challenged, flourish, and break glass ceilings. May you be so confident and have so much self-esteem, that you always remain grounded and humble.

I congratulate you and your family on your Oxford offer, and wish you the warmest welcome to your university.

A Bird's-Eye View of Oxford – a Whistle-Stop Tour of the Lives of International Students



Eliza Kaminska-Benadat

Congratulations and welcome to Oxford!

Your excitement and nerves must be working overtime. This is completely normal. Most, if not all, Oxford students of past and present experienced this. All that is left is a little more preparation and you will be in the city of dreaming spires.

University is a new start for all. The move away from home, family, and friends, while being planted in a new place with too many new people to count. Being an international student adds another layer, as the distance grows bigger and the differences become more obvious. Some things will seem more elusive than others, while some British nuances might just seem strange. This perspective is refreshing, these new takes are interesting, and don't hold back from sharing your opinion; it will definitely spark a tutorial-like discussion.

Before I dive into some specific areas, I just want to address the expectations around Oxford. In the media, literature, films, and from all over we are exposed to the idea that since Oxford is the pinnacle of education that the experience is nothing less than perfect. What a rose-coloured view! The romanticisation of Oxford perpetuates the idea that time in this city and university can only be a high. That you are perpetually at the top of the rollercoaster. But for there to be a high, there must be something lower.



The low is not perpetual, however its presence cannot be denied. Your time in Oxford will be filled with both highs and lows, because life doesn't stop outside the walls of this city. Everyone's time in Oxford is not just filled with academic matters, the personal also comes in tow. My time here has shown me that the combination of the highs and lows, the academic and personal, is the recipe for any adventure among the dreaming spires.

Drinking Culture

The mythical pub is a key part of the British aesthetic. Each pub has its unique charm, yet most people conjure up a stereotypical image. This includes dim lighting, some exposed brick, filled with people enjoying a drink after a long day. All these can be true, just like the drinking culture.

In Britain, popping to the pub is a common event, enjoyed by people of all ages. Here, people can socialise over a drink of their choice, unwind from their busy days, catch up on some missed news, and even meet new people that happen to sit nearby.

Term time at Oxford can be tiring, with its intense eight-week terms that are brimming with as much teaching as possible. Therefore, it is no surprise that students have their rituals to relax and decompress. An example of this is going for a drink in the pub, going to a BOP (Big Organised Party), or a club.

This may appear as a culture shock to some, especially those from countries where this side of student life isn't reflected. Some may have never taken part due to religious, cultural, or personal customs. Before university, I had only gone to one party with alcohol, in which I drank a small amount and had a good time with my friends. In Freshers' Week, I tried again, I went to a BOP, but I left early, and went to the Bar Night. What I saw was that the people present were a mixture of those who were drinking a lot, others who had a drink or two (which is where I belong), and the final group who did not drink, but wanted to see what it was like.



I hope this shows that, although drinking is part of student culture at Oxford, it shouldn't force people to partake in it. We are in a time where more people are choosing not to drink, or even just limiting it, hence there is space for everyone. The fear that not drinking can ostracise you is understandable and quite common, but it shouldn't push into doing things you are not comfortable with.

Similarly, coming to university and living away from home for the first time is a new experience that will allow you to try new things, so make the most out of it.

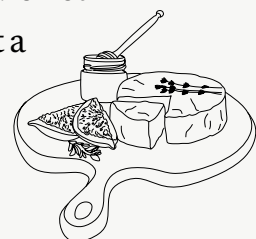
Food

The thing that is most missed by all students away from home is food. International students have the added barrier that their favourite, loved dishes may be harder to find. I am sure it is a universal experience to miss the food that reminds you of being back home, of family, and the times spent together.

Many students are not great cooks; most know the basics, but there is a gap between that and being able to cook a multi-step meal. Realistically, most students do not have the access to big enough kitchens, if they have access at all. It is not uncommon for first years to only have a basic kitchen, furnished with a toaster, a kettle, an oven, and maybe a hob or two. This does depend on the college. Hence, many rely on hall food or on eating out.

Fortunately, Oxford's diverse community has led to many good and varied places opening up across the city.

A hallmark is Gloucester Green Outdoor Market, commonly referred to as Gloucester Green. It is open from Wednesday to Saturday and is packed with vendors. It has stalls of ready-to-eat food, fruits and vegetables, and of handmade products. The food vendors vary from day to day, but there is Thai, Chinese, Korean, Italian, Jamaican, Turkish, Iraqi, Lebanese, Goan, and Tibetan food among others. I have heard from some international students that the food is not 100 percent like the one back home. However, it might satisfy your craving until you get a chance to enjoy loved dishes at home.



Another part of Oxford filled with good eats is Cowley. No longer OX1 but OX4, it is a little distance from the city centre but still very accessible. It can be reached by bus or walking, as it is just past Magdalen Bridge. It is filled with Middle Eastern, Asian, and Caribbean food. The prices are not unreasonable, plus they offer you the opportunity to explore another part of the city.

Apart from these two hubs, Oxford is sprinkled with good gems around the city that await discovery.

For more detailed reviews and amazing writing I highly recommend reading Valerie Wu's column *Risk Appetite* that she wrote for *The Oxford Blue*.



Societies

As mentioned before, moving countries for university can lead to many culture shocks. However, it may also lead to feelings of isolation. Many have experienced this, including myself, despite not being an international student. The isolation can become particularly poignant during holidays or special cultural celebrations.

Something to alleviate these feelings is to join the relevant national and cultural societies. Oxford is filled with them, for example there is the Polish Society, New Russian Society, Islamic Society, Hindu Society, African and Caribbean Society, Latin American Society, and many more can be found [here](#).

These societies often hold cultural events which allow students to get together and celebrate far from home. They are social hubs and can provide a support network outside of college. It can also be an opportunity to speak in your home language(s) and reminisce about home.

Also, if there isn't a society that represents you, it can be set up!

Conclusion

To summarise I would like to stress that there is no right way to experience Oxford! The university and the city are filled with so many diverse and unique people, hence it is perfectly logical that all these experiences are the same. Please don't feel like your time at Oxford has to be a box-ticking exercise. If you want to try something new or partake in any of the Oxford traditions, please do! Similarly, if you do not want to, for any number of reasons don't!

Something I have learnt myself, going into my final year, is that memories make themselves and as long as you have a few good people around you, you will have the best Oxford experience.

Best of luck to everyone!

P.S. At the end of my first year I made a playlist of the songs I listened to the most in Oxford. I highly recommend this as in a few years it will be like a time machine.

How to Look After Yourself During Freshers' Week

Alice Henderson



Illustration by Mya Sidhu. Used with permission.

Freshers' Week can be both a blessing and a curse. For some, the non-stop itinerary of events can be a useful distraction from feeling homesick, as well as a way to throw yourself straight into university life. For others, however, it can feel overwhelming. Ultimately, Freshers' Week is what you make of it. So here's how you can look after yourself during this time in order to enjoy it and settle in, without burning yourself out before you've even started!

Firstly, the most important thing to remember about Freshers' Week is that you don't have to do everything your college organises. If the thought of going clubbing every night makes your heart sink, you don't have to go. If you'd prefer to have an evening to yourself than go to that karaoke session, that's fine too. When your college gives you a timetable for the week, they'll often highlight which events are mandatory, like welcome talks or meetings with your tutors. But apart from that, most things are optional extras. These bonus events are supposed to help you settle in, but if you feel like they won't do that, don't worry about going simply because you think that you should. **Don't change yourself to fit Freshers' Week, change Freshers' Week to fit you.**

That said, there are a lot of really enjoyable events during the week that can help you adjust to your new environment. Orientation quizzes, for instance, can be a great way to familiarise yourself with the city. Oxford is quite a small city, but it can be difficult to navigate at first, and if, like me, directional skills aren't your strong point, starting to get your bearings early is vital. The Freshers' Ball (sometimes called the Freshers' Formal) is also guaranteed to be a lot of fun, and gives you a chance to wear those fancy clothes you've been waiting to bring out! Another one that's definitely not to be missed is the Freshers' Fair. In Exam Schools, you'll find stalls for every society you can imagine, and plenty more – everything from sports teams and music groups, to tea appreciation or tiddlywinks. Whether it's an old hobby or something new you'd like to take up, sign up for as many as you can – then you have all the information you need even if you change your mind at a later date. If nothing else, the Freshers' Fair is the perfect time to stock up on free tote bags (I think I somehow came back with about 20) and endless slices of pizza!

That's another important aspect of Freshers' Week – food. Before the whirlwind of Michaelmas kicks off, you can use this time to figure out how you're going to manage your meals during term. Living alone can be quite a big change, so being prepared from day one helps to make this transition manageable. Investigate your college's kitchen facilities, work out where your local shops are, and maybe stock up on some basic supplies. You could try your college's hall too – this is helpful if you want some cheap, hot food cooked for you (no washing up!) while you settle in. And make the most of all the free food during Freshers' Week – you'll soon learn as a student that events with free food are invaluable!

Now's the perfect opportunity to work out who you can talk to if things start to overwhelm you, either in Freshers' Week or the rest of your Oxford experience. Each college will have its own Welfare Team, often run by the nurse, chaplain, and a group of others. Making sure you know how to contact these people if and when you might need them saves a lot of time and stress for the future. Their contacts can be found on college websites, and in Freshers' Week you'll usually get a chance to meet them in person too. Regardless of which college you're in, the Welfare Team are always lovely people, and no problem is ever too small or too silly for them. At any point during Freshers' Week or beyond, don't hesitate to talk to them if you're feeling homesick, stressed, or would just like someone to chat to.

The nurse is an especially vital person to seek out in anticipation of the infamous Freshers' Flu. While you may be lucky and manage to escape it, it's good to be prepared and come armed with your favourite remedies: paracetamol, strepsils, and a hot water bottle are all must-haves. If you do get ill, a) I'm sorry, it's an inevitable part of being a Fresher (remember all those times you got ill in the first week of school...), but that doesn't make it any easier to bear. So, b) be kind to yourself, get lots of sleep, and give yourself time to recover. Try to keep talking to people, too, whether that's new friends or your college parent, family at home, or the college nurse – don't shut yourself up in your room and suffer in silence!

Freshers' Week is a great (and often very memorable) experience, but it can be exhausting too. If you get to the end of the week and you haven't found your lifelong friends yet, don't panic! That's perfectly normal. Often the people you meet in that first week won't be the ones who stick with you. (In fact, you might have just worked out who you don't want to see again!) This is just the start of term, and once you settle in, find your weekly routines, and get going with your course, everything will feel more normal. And hopefully, this will be the beginning of your first brilliant term at Oxford...

The Blue's Lifestyle section is the place for all things relevant on the day-to-day – food, sleep, socialisation... the list goes on.

Check out our website to see the full scope of what you could write with us for Lifestyle, and be sure to read our article on 'Demystifying Student Journalism' [Page 93] if you'd like to join us!

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How to Escape the University Bubble

Ned Remington

Reading through this Fresher's Guide is hopefully making you very excited for university life – formals, bops, societies, college families, college bars and wine cellars, obscure Oxford terminology: There are countless random (and bizarre) Oxford things you'll come across here that bring the charismatic university bubble to life.

For many people, the uniqueness of the Oxford University experience can also feel a bit disorienting at times, and a huge change from what you are used to back home. Once you've got stuck in with college life and inevitably signed up to almost every society at Fresher's Fair, the atmosphere here can feel intense, especially if you are coming from a smaller school or sixth-form college. The terms here are short, but can be a test of endurance. The formidable academic workload can feel intimidating, even all-consuming. Most Oxford students insist upon the importance of a work-life balance, seeing the city outside the (admittedly beautiful) libraries to stay sane.

Luckily, the city provides plenty of opportunities to escape the university bubble and connect with people outside the university. We're lucky at Oxford to have all the attractions (and late opening hours) of a fairly major city, but with everything within a 20 minute walk. Getting to know Oxford as a city as well as your university can make you feel more grounded, and make this city feel like the second home that it'll soon become for you.



Image by Jessica Gregory. Used with permission.

One of the best attractions of the city are its extensive green spaces, both inside colleges and across the city. Further out of town you can find Port Meadow and Hinksey Park, which offer great opportunities for picnics wild swimming in Trinity (or all year round if you're feeling brave). Oxford's Wild Swimming Society leads regular trips for those interested. If you cross the Thames at Port Meadow, it's only a short walk to the village of Bisney, where you can make a stop at The Perch or The Medley for a drink or something to eat. Aside from a few church spires in the distance, you'll have left Oxford out of sight. Christchurch Meadows are accessible to everyone, including members of the public, and there are some rewarding loop walks around along the canal and River Isis, where you'd be forgiven for forgetting you are in a city at all. University Parks is often the easiest place for many students to go to relax in nature: students who enjoy a friendly run can join the University Parks Parkrun at 9am every Saturday Morning, which many Oxford residents, as well as students and academics, insist on attending, even in the freezing blues of Hilary Term.

If you're a theatregoer, have a look into the productions taking place at The Oxford Playhouse, or the New Theatre Oxford. For the top recommendations, make sure to check back on The Oxford Blue Culture section, which regularly reviews local theatre! You can often also find music nights at The Oxford Playhouse and across the city, including open mic nights that you can take part in at bars and pubs across the centre, including the Red Lion on Gloucester Street. For those intimidated by the formality of much of the Oxford university music scene, open-mics can be a great way to build up performing confidence, and earn yourself a free drink.

Often, the best way to connect with people outside the University is through the many community social action initiatives across the city. The Oxford Student Social Action Coalition, formed last year, brings together Turl Street Homeless Action, New College Curry Runners, and Food Rescuers to provide a way for students to support those experiencing homelessness in Oxford. Groups of student volunteers will walk around the city centre in the evenings, giving food and hot drinks (also with clothing and sleeping bags) to those in need. Students can also volunteer with Oxford Mutual Aid, who pack and deliver parcels to households across Oxford with food, toiletries and baby supplies. Volunteers can help with delivering or preparing support packages, making a real difference to those who need it. Some colleges offer opportunities to volunteer at local primary schools to teach and encourage Oxford's younger academic population : This takes you right to the heart of Oxford's local community, and provides a rewarding experience for anyone considering heading into teaching. Others might be interested in volunteering with Jacari, which provides refugee, migrant and asylum-seeker children and young people with English-language lessons and support with building a life for themselves in Oxford. All are welcome to take part, especially those with second language skills. Volunteering can be an effective way to feel grounded in the city, whilst also giving back to the local community.

Those involved with political activism can find district and city branches of every major political party here in Oxford, with strong connections to student political societies, who are always looking for canvassers and doorknockers during election seasons. Political campaign groups like Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and Make Votes Matter have groups up and running in the city for those who want to dedicate some time to the causes they are passionate about.

Those looking for creative and activist opportunities should look no further than **Common Ground Café**, which has re-opened this summer after a brief period of closure, and also serves as an artsy study spot to fit every Oxford student stereotype. Studying in cafés can be an effective way to get out of the library and break up the intimidating workload – when your budget allows. **The Independent Café**, **Café Nero** and **Black Sheep Coffee** are among the more popular spots, but you can work just as well in **Greggs** or **Costa**.

Escaping the university bubble doesn't have to mean abandoning your new uni friends. Going on walks, runs or swims together can be an effective way to get to know aspects about one another which wouldn't necessarily come up in conversation about typically 'Oxford' things, often helping to take away some of the slight cliqueness that this university can generate.

The university experience is exhilarating. Hopefully, you can't wait to get stuck in with all the quirks of college and university life. Most people understand university life as a balance between your academic life, and getting stuck in with student societies and university socials. It's important not to forget to get to know the city in which you'll be living. For new undergraduates, this city will be your home for at least three years, and they should be some of the best years of your life. Escaping the uni bubble will can be a key part of the Oxford experience – if you find yourself needing to take a step back from the chaos, and take stock of how you are using your time, there's a myriad of opportunities to rebalance, and make the adrenaline of Oxford calm into something that feels a bit more sustainable.

The Blue's Columns section is the place to really let out your inner thoughts. With a regular feature on our website, you have the chance to gain a personal connection to your readers.

If you prefer reading these pieces, then become a Junior Editor for the section. This means editing your favourite recurring pieces throughout term!

Check out our website to see the full scope of what you could write with us for Columns, and be sure to read our article on 'Demystifying Student Journalism' [Page 93] if you'd like to join us!

I Missed Fresher's Week, But I Was Never Late At All

Rida Qasar

I missed Freshers' Week.

While everyone else was arriving at college, unpacking their suitcases, and learning the peculiar vocabulary of Oxford – bops, battels, collections – I was in hospital. My health had not been the best over the summer after A-levels, and by the time I was discharged and finally arrived at St Hilda's College, term had already begun.

Oxford is not particularly good at moving slowly. Eight week terms leave little room for hesitation, and I arrived feeling as though the university had started without me. There was no week to learn the shape of the city, to make my room feel lived-in, or simply to become accustomed to the fact that this was now home. Almost immediately, I was translating German passages, learning the Arabic alphabet, and preparing for tutorials, while still trying to work out my way around a city everyone else seemed to know.

Freshers' Week is given an almost mythological importance before you arrive at university. It is supposedly when you meet your closest friends, 'find yourself', and learn how university works – all conveniently before your first essay deadline. Missing it made me wonder whether everyone else had already learnt something I hadn't. (Of course, they hadn't.)

What helped most when I arrived was being able to find my own pace. St Hilda's was incredibly accommodating, giving me the space to look after my health while beginning my degree. I learnt early that there is little virtue in struggling silently. Personal tutors, welfare teams, and academic staff cannot make Oxford move any slower, but they can help make its pace manageable.

By the end of that first term, I was doing far better academically than I had expected. More importantly, I was beginning to understand that settling into Oxford was less about catching up with everyone else than learning my own pace.

Imposter syndrome is discussed so frequently here that the phrase risks becoming part of the Oxford vocabulary itself. I certainly felt it. But slowly, Oxford became easier to navigate, both academically and socially. I learnt which libraries made me work and which ones made me want to admire the architecture. I learnt that criticism of an essay was not criticism of me.

There were other parts of university life I had to find my own way through. As a Muslim, I personally don't drink. Before university, I knew drinking would be part of student life; I hadn't quite appreciated how easily it could become the social life itself. Missing Freshers' Week perhaps spared me some anxiety about that. But once I arrived, I realised that not drinking did not mean standing outside university life looking in. Other people didn't drink, for religious reasons or otherwise, and friendship was not confined to nights out.

Somewhat ironically, I had begun making friends before I had even arrived. Pre-university group chats were a lifeline for me, and societies later introduced me to people I would never have met through my degree or college alone. Coming from a Pakistani household in East London, I had been used to being surrounded by different cultures and backgrounds without really thinking about it. At Oxford, societies like ISOC and PakSoc gave me some of the familiarity I had taken for granted at home, while others introduced me to people I would never otherwise have met.

I found that Oxford can appear, particularly from the outside, to be 'one place'. Living here teaches you that there are many versions of it. Some may never feel particularly natural to you; others slowly will.

I cannot remember a singular moment where Oxford began to feel familiar; instead, it happened in increments. A route through the city stopped requiring Google Maps. I found the library I returned to without thinking. Faces became friends. Tutorials became less frightening. My room accumulated the clutter that makes a temporary place feel permanent. And, because I thrive perhaps a little too much on academic validation, occasionally an essay went well, and I thought: *I am meant to be here*. Then another essay came back, and I questioned it all over again.

If there is one other key thing I would tell an incoming fresher, it is not to expect settling in to be a linear process. Your first essay might be terrible. Your first night out might be worse. You might not meet your closest friends in Freshers' Week. You might call home more often than you expected, struggle to recognise yourself in the people around you, or discover that the version of Oxford you had imagined bears little resemblance to the one you encounter.

A difficult first week can be just that: a difficult first week. There will be good days followed by terrible ones, weeks when Oxford feels entirely ordinary, and others when you wonder how you ended up here at all. By the middle of term, welfare teas, society events, and an evening spent doing anything but your reading list can matter more than you might expect. Sometimes it is the smaller things that carry you through an eight-week term. Feeling settled is not something you achieve once and then keep.

Profiles

When I finally arrived at Oxford, people kept telling me that, given the choice, they might happily have missed Freshers' Week themselves. At the time, I thought they were only trying to make me feel better. Now, going into my third year, I think I understand.

I had spent so much of my first term thinking in terms of being behind: behind socially, behind academically, behind everyone who seemed to have settled in more easily than I had. But there was never really anything to catch up to. University was not unfolding at the same pace for any of us.

I arrived a week late.

It turned out I wasn't late at all.

The Blue's Profiles section is the place to shine a spotlight on the people you think deserve it most, and to have the conversations on what keeps our world going behind the scenes.

Check out our website to see the full scope of what you could write with us for Profiles, and be sure to read our article on 'Demystifying Student Journalism' [Page 93] if you'd like to join us!

The Bluebell

Out with the In

Laurence Britton

There once was an anxious young fresher,
More tangled than a staircase of Escher –
Up all day and all night,
Hours lost to pure fright,
And trapped under bundles of pressure.

“Is this what it really will be?
This should be the time I grow free!
Here I am locked away,
Only work and no play,
My world hemmed in by this degree.

“O daydreams– where am I to find them:
Picnics, parties, and friendly mayhem?
That goal was a ghost,
A fancy – at most.
It just can’t be found now – this gem.”

A “QUIET” from the man there who scowled
(for he realised he wondered aloud)
Shook the dust of the shelves,
And quite jangled some bells,
So left the new student quite cowed.

The Bluebell

Pssssss... scoot over here – let me tell you,

Whispered an old student he knew

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There are places galore,

Green stuff to adore,

“Pssssss... scoot over here – let me tell you,”

Whispered an old student he knew,

“You just have to find

That thing that your mind

Needs to not always be kinda blue.

“In papers and books you’re a marvel,

Your writing and researching – quite artful.

But in what lies outside,

You’re lacking a guide:

Come with me – we’ll try just a morsel.”

From library, from college, they strode on

Till towers and buildings were all gone.

“It is here I am free

And just go YIPPEEEEE”

Prancing in the trees – not a bit wan.

“Wherever you are in the city

When fed up of the nitty gritty

There are places galore,

Green stuff to adore,

And lord, is it always so pretty!

The Bluebell

A wintertime walk in Port Meadow:

The icy-dewed grass – it is très beau;

A bleak

But quite

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There are so so many to mention...

To bore was never my intention:

“A wintertime walk in Port Meadow:
The icy-dewed grass – it is très beau;
A bleak misty sight,
But quite chilly at night,
A great place to de-stress you should know.

“You ask where I go to zoom out?
On the hill of South Park, not a doubt!
The menacing spires
From here just retire
Watching sunset shimmer round about.

“Get mooded at in meadows of Christ Church,
And on the green bank take your soft perch:
The rowers each morn
(Somehow not forlorn)
Are a sight as they sweep, skim, and lurch.

“There are so so many to mention...
To bore was never my intention:
Hinksey, Wellington,
Angel Greyhound, Marston –
They all do deserve your attention.

The Bluebell

“So let me now leave you with this –

In just work it’s hard to find bliss.

Nature scratches this itch

And my life does enrich:

Have a go – trying won’t go amiss!”

“So let me now leave you with this –

In just work it’s hard to find bliss.

Nature scratches this itch

And my life does enrich:

Have a go – trying won’t go amiss!”

A Letter and a Response

Jessica Gregory

A Letter to Third Year Me

I'm scared of going to university,
For many reasons, you see.
Everyone has expectations,
Of how they think it'll be.

I'm scared of meeting new people,
When my anxiety is so high;
I'm scared of leaving my family,
I'll never be ready to say goodbye.

There's a guy I met recently,
And we've become such close friends,
Everyone thinks we're dating already,
But I guess that must now come to an
end.

I'm fearful of the workload,
I know Oxford is so tough.
I feel I chose an "easy subject",
I doubt I'll ever be enough.

A Response to First Year Me

I know you're scared of going to
university.
Of course, there's many reasons to be.
You have so many expectations,
But it won't be all that bad, you see.

It wasn't anxiety in the end,
I finally saw it was something more.
And yes, saying goodbye is saddening,
But, little by little, it gets easier, for sure.

That guy you met recently stayed,
In fact he did so much more.
He flew across Europe to see you,
Almost as many times as four.

The workload was a lot,
But I managed it bit by bit.
And, sure there's moments of doubt,
But this university is the perfect fit.

The Bluebell

It's not just me that's leaving,
My friends are also moving away.
We all promise to stay in contact.
We're all terrified, but won't say.

I was told we'd all be in the same boat,
But I feel ever so alone.
I want back the noisiness of my house,
I'm not used to being on my own.

I've never done laundry before,
Or had to cook every night,
But now scanning the aisles for dinner,
Is becoming a daily fight.

I daren't dream about next year,
When I'll be jetting off on a plane,
Because I'll have my year abroad,
And I'll have to do this all again.

Everyone thinks I'll drop out,
As I phone my friends all day long,
All I want is to enjoy my subject again,
And not fear that my passion is gone.

I'm going to tell you something,
That may make you sad,
You left the group chat with all your
friends,
But, trust me, you'll be glad.

The solitude has become peaceful,
And I enjoy being alone.
The noisiness of the house is too much,
Because I'm used to being alone.

Laundry is now second nature,
So is cooking every night.
I love trying out new recipes,
Or making little treats of pure delight.

I still don't like thinking of last year,
When I jetted off on many planes.
But, it's because the memories were so
wonderful,
And I crave to be back there once again.

No-one thinks I'll drop out,
Because I've coped on my own for so
long,
I finally feel passion for languages again,
And I feel that the fire in me shall never
be gone.

The Bluebell

I don't know how I'm going to make it,
When I'm struggling every day to cope.
Please, Third Year Me, tell me how.
Offer me some words of hope.

I don't know how I'm going to make it,
When I'm struggling every day to cope.
Please, Third Year Me, tell me how.
Offer me some words of hope.

I know that we're going to make it,
Even though there's days when it's hard
to cope,
But I promise you, First Year Me,
The future is always full of hope.

Even though there's days when it's hard to cope,
But I promise you, First Year Me,
The future is always full of hope.

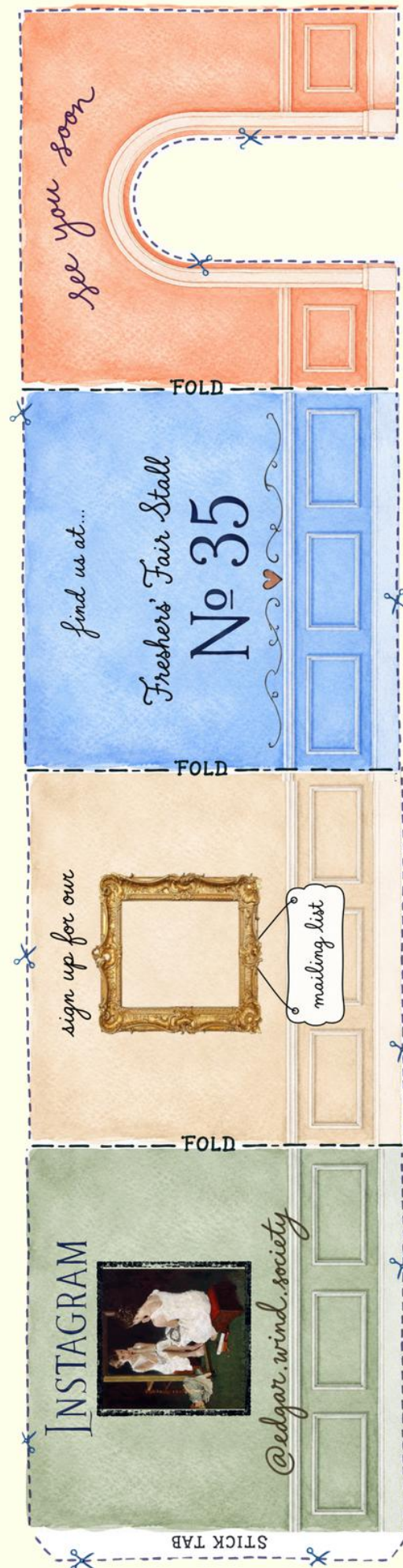
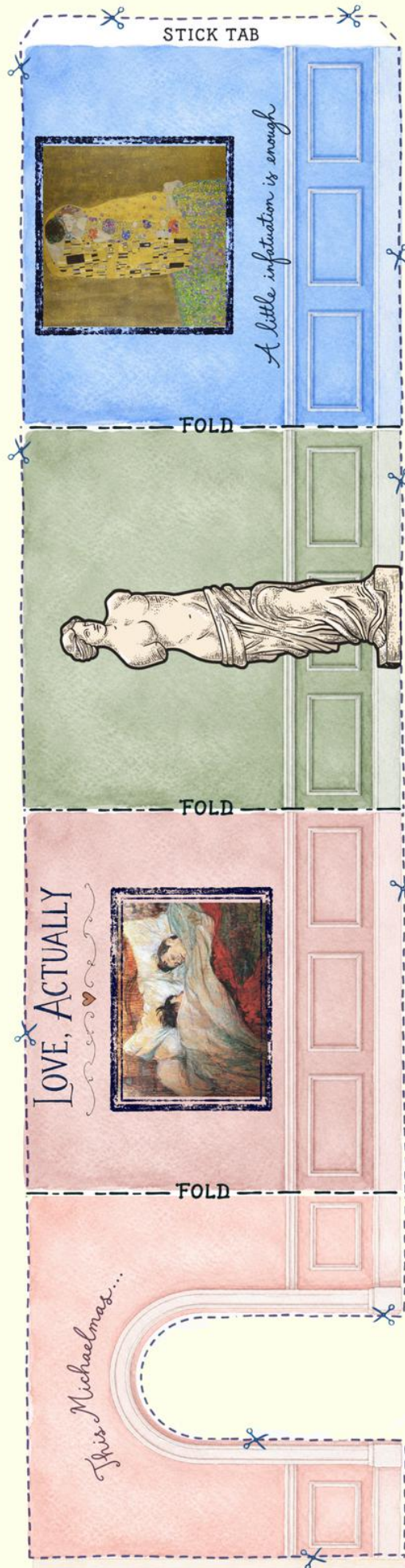
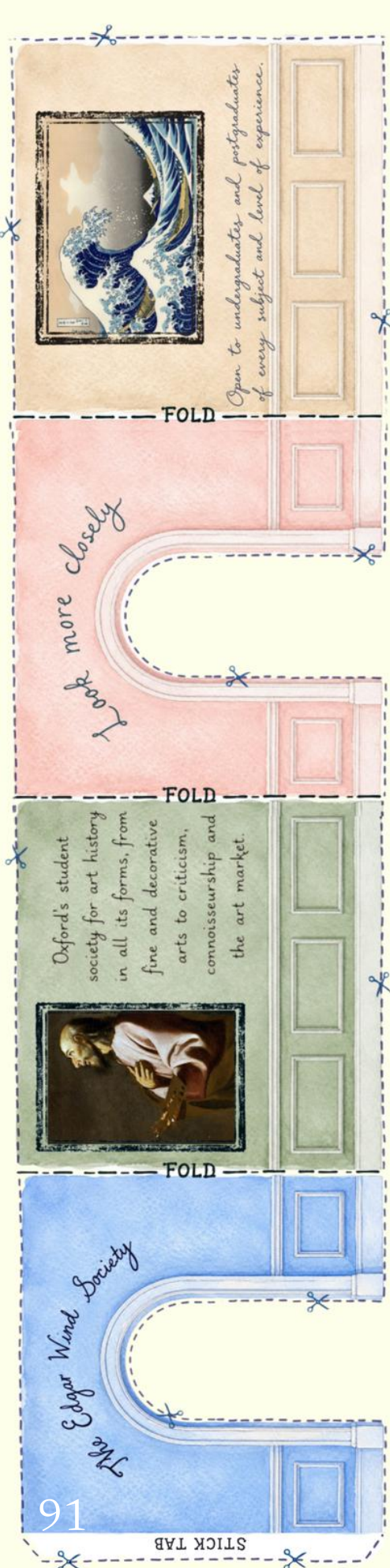
The Bluebell

The Bluebell is *The Blue*'s section dedicated to pure creativity – poetry, prose... we welcome it all.

Have a look through our website to see what other students have written. If you'd like to publish something you've written with *The Blue*, be sure to read our section on 'Demystifying Student Journalism' [Page 93]

THE EDGAR WIND SOCIETY

Cut and fold your own private view with Oxford's society for the History of Art.





Society Spotlights

Demystifying Student Journalism: The Oxford Blue

Jessica Gregory

Two years ago, when I was wandering around the Freshers' Fair, I had one goal in mind: find *Cherwell*. Now, this may seem like a strange thing to say, coming from the current Editor-in-Chief (EiC) of *The Blue*, but when I began my Oxford journey, I truly thought there was only one paper. Now, I'm (obviously) aware that there's plenty more beyond. Oxford's journalism and media scene is thriving, and easily accessible to anyone, considering that you don't even need to purchase a membership! When I joined the university all the way back in 2024, I genuinely had no idea how I could get involved as a fresher, believing that papers were too prestigious, and assuming I was lacking experience. However, I'm here to tell you that's simply not true. Sit back, and let's debunk student journalism together.

True or False: There is only one Oxford paper.

False! False! False! This is probably the best place to start, as it's something I learnt very quickly too. Now, considering that you're reading our guide, I'm assuming that you're aware that *The Blue* exists. As an entirely independent student newspaper in Oxford, we are set slightly apart from the crowd, but that only makes us more approachable! If you're looking to get involved in other newspapers, you've got *Cherwell*, *The Oxford Student (OxStu)*, among others. A good place to start could be your own college magazine and/or newspaper. Outside of that, there's a variety of subject-specific magazines, such as *The Diplomatic Dispatch* (check out our spotlight on that in this guide!), *The Oxford Scientist*, and *The Oxford Linguist* (very fun for language students and/or multilingual students who want to utilise your language skills for something aside from translations). Outside of traditional newspapers, there's plenty of other media opportunities in Oxford, such as *Oxide Radio*, or *Oxford Media Society*. My top tip would be to keep your eyes peeled at the Freshers' Fair, because you never know what you may find! And be open minded – yes, I did want to be at *Cherwell* originally, but life has steered me towards *The Blue*, and I couldn't be happier because of it!

Society Spotlights

True or False: All Oxford papers are basically the same.

False! I'm not here to speak about other papers, but as someone on the inside, it's clear that they aren't. Some papers are known for their prestige, for the authors who wrote for them, for the longevity of their paper etc. However, *The Blue* is known for the OPPOSITE of all that. We were founded in 2020, and therefore, we're relatively in Oxford newspaper infancy. That means we love hearing new ideas and incorporating diversity into every section all the time (rather just occasionally sprinkling it in). We pride ourselves on inclusivity and accessibility. We're innovative, artsy, and have more sections than other student papers. Primarily, we are the ONLY Oxford paper with a Global Affairs section, but we also have other cool sections like Environment. That means it's impossible to not find a section suited to you. You may ask what makes us different from other papers, but I ask you what makes us the same!

True or False: There's something for everyone in student journalism.

True! And a very important one to remember as well! From the outside, it can seem a bit daunting to understand the different roles, so I've included a little diagram below to add some clarity. Please note, I only have the expertise to speak about *The Blue*, but hopefully this transparency makes it clearer that there's a variety of roles you can be included in!

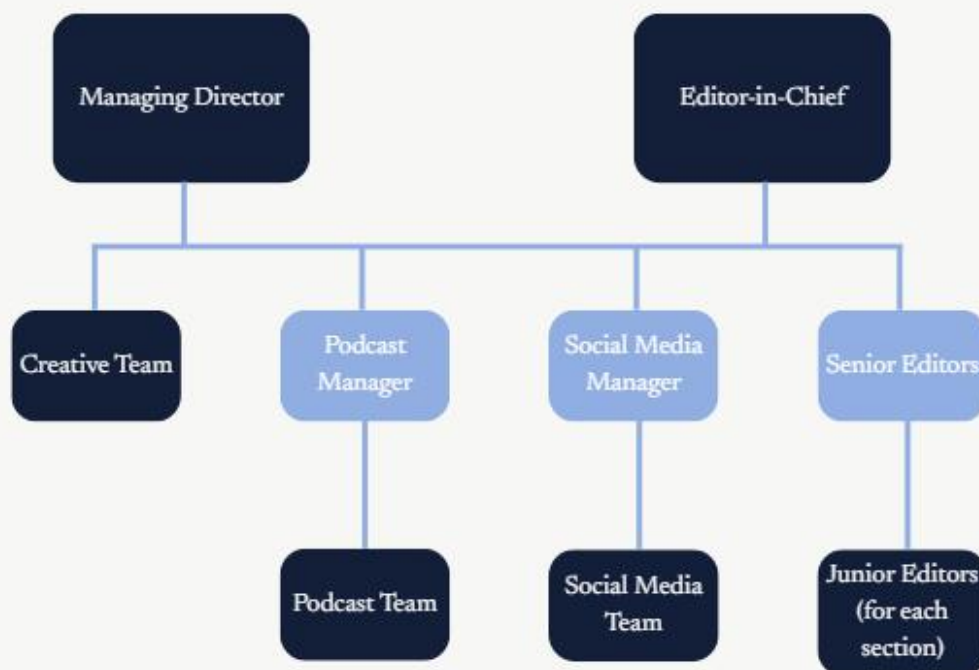


Illustration by Jessica Gregory. Used with permission.

Society Spotlights

At the top of the tree, we have the **Editor-in-Chief (EiC) and Managing Director (MD)**. Every term, we have two EiCs in order for the paper to run smoothly. Their role is pretty interchangeable with the MD, although the MD's role is slightly more business-related. If you decide to be involved with *The Blue* this term, then all of the sections are divided between the three of us so we can manage the paper more closely, although how management is divided may change with each term. In one sentence, the role of the EiCs and MD is to make sure nothing goes wrong, provide support for the team, and make sure the paper is thriving (both in terms of publication and finances). It's a big role, but should you decide to do it throughout your degree, then it looks amazing on your CV!

The **Creative Team** this term is being looked after by our MD, Mya, as she used to be an illustrator for the team (see, you really can change to anything you like!). The Creative Team is in charge of illustrations for *The Blue*, often used in our columns, but is also useful for other projects, such as the Freshers' Guide you are reading!

The **Podcast Manager**, as the name implies, manages the Podcast Team. This is a new role, and one we're very excited about! We're going to be massively enhancing the use of our podcast this term, so you can hear us on the way to your lectures. Stay tuned for more details, as we've got a lot planned!

Similarly, the **Social Media Manager** is in charge of promoting all of our articles, and managing their team to do the same thing. Whilst this may seem daunting, we can train you up to truly understand how we manage our social accounts, plus it's a good bit of experience!

Finally onto the writing! We have a **Senior Editor (SE)** for each section of our newspaper, plus The Bluebell (for those who don't know, this is the creative writing section of our paper!). It's the job of each SE to manage their team, produce the required number of articles each week, include diversity in the paper, and edit. It's up to the SE how much they want to write, although every SE must be involved with editing (although, everyone is in *The Blue*). It's certainly a step up from being **Junior Editor (JE)**, but once again, great for the CV, and a chance to learn how to manage a team.

Society Spotlights

And the very essence of our work – **the Junior Editors!** JEs are responsible for writing most of the articles (if they so choose), creating commissions for our social media, and helping with the editing of others' work. This sounds scarier than it is, I promise! You'll have to attend one meeting a week, and do edits if you have the time, but it's a very lowkey commitment, but certainly a step into journalism. If you're looking to get involved in student media, this is the best place to start, as you don't need any previous experience (we train you!). Plus, applications are on a rolling basis, so make sure to check out the link on our Instagram!

True or False: I don't like writing articles, so student journalism isn't for me.

False! Within *The Blue*, there are so many roles available. Whether that's creative writing with *The Bluebell*, to being an illustrator, to using your business skills as MD, there's a reason for anyone to apply! And if you don't enjoy it, then it's only one term, and a good bit of experience!

True or False: If I don't feel ready now, I can wait until next term to apply.

True! In fact, you can apply whenever you feel ready! **Junior Editor applications are on a rolling basis**, so once you've got your feet under the table, feel free to join the team. This also applies to illustrators, columnists, social media team, and podcast team. If you would like to go higher up the chain and become a manager, SE, or even EiC and MD, then you will have to wait a little. But don't worry, all roles are reset at the end of every term (even if you want to reapply), which gives everyone the chance to get involved in a role that interests them!

True or False: I have no experience, I can't apply.

False! For entry-level roles, you need absolutely no experience! If you apply, we have every bit of training you'll need to make you feel right at home! In fact, if you're a Fresher, then we'd openly encourage you to apply. *The Blue* wants to accommodate everyone and welcome new, keen writers to the team – don't be scared to apply as we are truly open to all!

Society Spotlights

True or False: I can write about anything for any section.

True! Whatever your interests are, we want to hear them! If you're not a member of *The Blue*, just send your piece to editoroxblue@gmail.com or, alternatively, email the corresponding SE. If you're already a JE (or SE, for that matter), you can write a piece for any section. You have obligations to the section you are assigned (and that you applied for), so make sure you don't take too much on, but feel free to explore the boundless limits of student journalism by dipping your toes in other sections.

True or False: I don't know whether I want to commit to a role, but that means I can't respond to commissions.

False! In fact, responding to commissions is one of the best ways to make a start! Committing to a role can be scary when you're only just committing to your studies. However, *The Blue* sends out commissions weekly as an encouragement to get your piece in our paper. They're there as prompts and inspiration, so definitely make sure to respond to them. Just be sure to email first to secure the commission in case someone comes in and takes it!

True or False: I can contact *The Blue* if I have any other questions.

True (of course!). You can email us at editoroxblue@gmail.com, or find us on our Instagram. We welcome any questions (there are NEVER silly questions), and are always more than happy to hear about your interest in us!

Oxford's 'Fastest Growing Society', The Oxford Diplomatic Society

Jessica Gregory

The Oxford Diplomatic Society was founded at the onset of the pandemic. Since then, it has been named the '*Fastest Growing Society*' in Oxford, with hundreds of members, and over 2,500 subscribers to support the claim. But what do they do? Why should you get involved? What can they offer you?

The Diplomatic Society, as suggested by the name, aims to support diplomacy through the 21st century. With peace, unity, and diversity at its forefront, it promotes peaceful resolutions and discussions of current events, conflicts, and crises globally. The society is supported by their Board of Excellencies, which includes former ambassadors and diplomats, alongside generous sponsors and partners from across the globe.

The Society promotes its message through a host of interactive workshops, events, and more throughout the year. For Michaelmas Term alone, they've already confirmed high-profile figures such as the Crown Prince Leka II of Albania, the Marshal for the Diplomatic Corps, and the former President of Kosovo. Even beyond the names, there are plenty of opportunities to develop your diplomacy skills, such as their Careers series. One highlight this coming term will be with Risk Horizons and the Equinor Group on careers in geopolitical risk forecasting. This will provide a fascinating insight into a private sector career in international affairs, truly offering the chance to not only boost your CV but develop your interests and career insights. There will also be an event with the Director of Admissions for an insight into Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

Society Spotlights

Beyond that, there's also opportunities for domestic and international delegations. This includes embassy trips to London, in which members are welcome to speak at these premises. More information for this can be found on their website. Also, stay tuned for the society's flagship international trip this Michaelmas!



Image provided by Oxford Diplomatic Society. Used with permission.

As with any society, social events are the best way to meet new, like-minded people from across the university. The Diplomatic Society is proud to be hosting one at the beginning of term (a great way to meet your first friends from outside your college!), which will be a global affairs quiz, and a great chance to meet your committee! Plus, they're hosting an even larger Festive Celebration towards the end of term. And if you've been dreaming of attending an Oxford ball, then your first opportunity could be attending the society's collaborative ball with Oxford Women in Business, the 'OxWIB President's Ball with OSG and OxDiplo'. Don't miss out on their Gala Dinner in Hilary Term, which aims to bring diplomats, ambassadors, students, and more together for an evening celebrating the Oxford Diplomatic Society. In order to get priority access, it's recommendable to become a member!

If there's an event that interests you, but you don't know anyone else attending, make sure you still check it out! Not only is this a great chance to step outside your comfort zone and meet new people, but every member of the committee is friendly and approachable, so feel free to make yourself known to them!

Society Spotlights

But how can you get involved beyond attending events? There are so many ways to be part of the process in the Diplomatic Society. With a committee consisting of over 20 members, it's a challenge not to find a role that suits you! One of the more accessible ways to play a role in the society is via **The Diplomatic Dispatch**. This is the society's online publication, which regularly publishes and produces analytical and opinion pieces on international affairs and diplomacy.

If writing articles isn't for you, then you can get involved in their **Diplomatic Academy**, in which experts and practitioners are invited to deliver practical workshops and skills training. Upon completion of the programme, individuals are awarded certificates. Be aware that applications are competitive, and therefore it's advisable to follow the Instagram ([@oxford_diplomatic_society](https://www.instagram.com/oxford_diplomatic_society)) and sign up for the newsletter to be notified about the opening date for the opportunity.

One of the most notable aspects of the society is their goal to remain accessible to everyone whilst maintaining high standards of the content they deliver to their members. Last year, they unveiled their new Access Fund at an alumni networking event, generously hosted by Farrer & Co at their London Office. The Fund is designed to reduce financial barriers to participation, ensuring that the opportunities the Society offers remain open to members regardless of background. More information about this can be found on their website.



Image provided by Oxford Diplomatic Society. Used with permission.

Society Spotlights

Whilst you may have preconceptions about what a member looks like, there is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to the Oxford Diplomatic Society. No matter what background, what course, what interests, or what future aspirations you have – everyone is welcome. The most important thing is that young people from all backgrounds can meaningfully engage with global challenges that face diplomacy, peace, and international cooperation.

If this sounds like something that would interest you, you can check out memberships on their website [here](#). Although you can purchase a year-long membership to test the waters, the lifetime membership is great value for money, and gives access to all their events, excursions, and more. Make sure to also check out their term card for all the events happening this term, follow their [Instagram](#), and sign up to their newsletter for all the latest updates! There’s truly no reason not to get involved in the ‘Fastest Growing Society’ in Oxford!

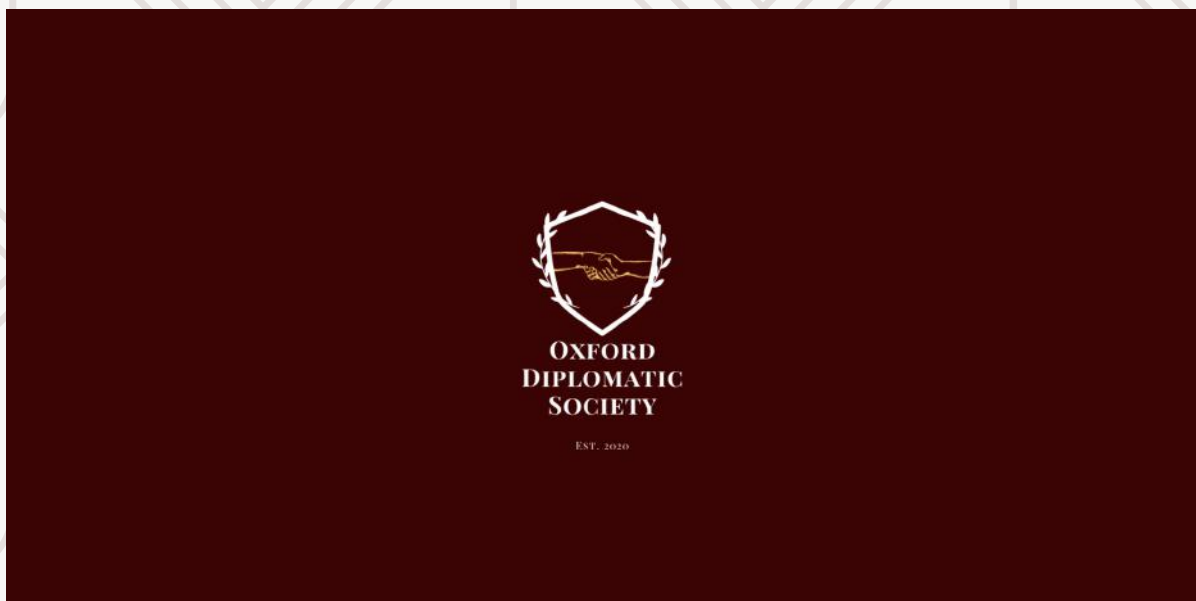


Image provided by Oxford Diplomatic Society. Used with permission.

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Societies and Local Businesses to Try:

Societies Not to Miss

We know that the Freshers' Fair can be intimidating, with so many options to choose from. Throughout this guide, there's many societies mentioned that you can join! Why not also check out the ones below?

List of Societies:

- Wadham Dramatics Society
- Oxford University RFC
- Oxford Music Soc
- Oxford Lithuanian Society

List of Businesses:

- Plush (LGBTQ+ Nightclub, see Page 23 for more!)
- Flight Club (Amazing bar with social darts – great student discounts!)



Some of the team at Flight Club's rooftop area last Trinity Term! The sun was blazing.
Image credit: Tallulah Stephens Skeete



Life in Oxford

Money-Saving Tips!

Jessica Gregory

As a student, you're probably going to have to learn to budget and save as much as possible. Whilst this can be difficult to navigate at first, here are some tips on how to save money when your student loan is running out:

Budget – Budgeting is a complete necessity, and also an underrated tool. Yes, there are people who may say they can do it all in their head, but as with making timetables, it's often better to see it all laid out. If you know how much you have to spend, you're more likely to stick to it. Some people suggest transferring a fixed budget from your student loan account to your regular current account every week to make sure you don't overspend.

Analyse your spending – This one may seem quite boring, but it could be surprising what you find. Once you've had your first month or term at university, go through your previous bank statements with a highlighter. Perhaps have a different colour for each category of spending (e.g. food, clothes, socialising etc.) or just one highlighter to point out any unnecessary spending. You'd be surprised how quickly those late-night Tesco trips add up!

Life in Oxford

Change your supermarket – It can often feel like Tesco is your only choice when you first arrive in Oxford, but often this isn't the case. Do your weekly food shop online with more reasonably-priced supermarkets, and you'll be able to save yourself a decent amount (by doing this, one month of food at a different supermarket is totalling the same as two Tesco weekly shops for me!)

Buy own-brand – As a student, there's never any shame in buying unbranded food or beauty products. Certainly, there may be a shampoo you prefer to buy as a nice treat for the week, but not everything in your basket needs to be branded. Rather, shops-own products can be just as good and save you a fortune!

Do weekly food shops – If you run to Tesco every time you need dinner, you're almost certainly going to spend more than if you do it all in one go. Planning ahead for the week means less trips to the shops, which equals less chance of impulse buying.

Meal prep – This one can take a little practice, especially with a lack of good kitchen facilities in Oxford. That being said, meal prepping can not only reduce the time you spend cooking, but also reduce your outgoings on food by using the same ingredients across three or four meals.

Delete your E-wallet – If you delete Apple/Google Pay and leave your wallet at home, then it makes impulse shopping an even harder exercise. After any lecture, it's so easy to go and buy a snack to make yourself feel better, but if you have biscuits at home, there may be no need. If you stop giving yourself the option to buy things, you'll only get the extra sweet treat when you truly want one!

Life in Oxford

Budget on a night out – With the ability to just tap your card, it's so easy to lose track of spendings. If you set a fixed amount, perhaps even bringing the cash, then it means you can enjoy a night out without the next-day anxiety about the amount you spent on the kebab, or a round of drinks. Make sure to not limit yourself too much though, as fun is just as important!

Walking or cycling to lectures – This is for those who live a little further out (or one to remember if you will be living further out next year). Bus fares, unfortunately, add up rather quickly, and therefore you could save the bus for special occasions rather than a daily occurrence. Investing in a bike, if you know you are going to be living a little further out, will save you £100s and hours of waiting for buses across your time here. That being said, balance this one carefully in Michaelmas so you don't turn up to every class drenched!

Make the most of free food – Throughout Freshers' Week especially, although also in JCR and college events throughout the year, there's often an array of food on offer. Just by joining in you could be welcome to a meal, so make the most of the free things available!

Part-time work – This one comes with a warning label attached. At Oxford, you're not allowed to engage in part-time work, although there are still some opportunities to work on the bar, be a fire warden, become a student ambassador, and more. Your college should send you emails with these opportunities, so keep your eyes peeled, as the range of opportunities available can vary greatly between colleges! Even outside of term, there's the opportunity to get involved in part-time work at home, but make sure you aren't working so much that you burn out.

Life in Oxford

Bursaries, bursaries, bursaries! – One of the biggest benefits of going to Oxford is the amount of bursaries awarded. Before term begins, if you're entitled to a university bursary, they should be in contact via email to let you know. Colleges also have a number of bursaries, grants, and other financial support available, including accommodation bursaries, book grants, or subject-specific bursaries, so be sure to check out what they have on offer. If you ever find yourself struggling financially, they may be able to provide a financial hardship fund for you, so make sure to reach out if you ever do struggle.

Oxford (to) English Dictionary

Jessica Gregory

When I started my language degree, I thought that the only new vocab I'd be picking up was from my new language. Little did I know that I would also need a pocket-sized dictionary for my daily life too! One of the most prestigious aspects of Oxford is the archaic roots tied to every building, every tutorial, and every dinner. However, that has also seeped into Oxfordian English too. Not sure how to differentiate between your Subfuses and Matriculations? Your Plodge from your Pidge? Don't worry, it's all here for you! And if you ever need a word that isn't included here, then check the university's official website here: [Oxford glossary](#).

(This comes with a heavy warning of the stupidities of language in Oxford. You may laugh now, but, regrettably, you will be using it within no time!)

Battels – This is basically your rent, with a few other things tied in. What's included differs greatly by college but expect an accommodation deposit in first term, and possibly meals also taken out.

Bod – You probably already know that one of the main libraries is the Bodleian, which is often referred to as the Bod. However, most of the libraries form part of the *Bodleian Library* network as well, which encompasses all of centrally administered libraries of Oxford.

Bod Card – You will be given this during Freshers' Week, so make sure to know when you're meant to pick it up. This is your student ID card, which allows you access to buildings, possibly your own bedroom, and is often asked for when accessing student discounts. Try not to lose this one! (But don't worry, you will, *in all likelihood*, leave it in your room at least once).

BOP – I only recently learnt that this stands for *Big Organised Party* (not sure why it took me two years but hey-ho!). Colleges host BOPs throughout the year, and these often have themes that you need to dress up for. The beginning of the night is always awkward, but by the end, everyone is having fun!

Bursar – the person who handles finance in college.

Life in Oxford

Carnations – For your exams, you're expected to wear carnations pinned to your gown (these will be given by college parents), to signify how far into your exams you are. For your first exam, you wear white, all the middle exams, pink, and your final exam, red.

Collections – Please don't freak out by the third letter! These are exams at the beginning of every term, used as a way to consolidate learning from the previous term. These are taken in college, and can be considered as mock exams, although even that is giving too much weight to them. Basically, your tutors want to see that you kept your work up during the holidays and didn't forget everything whilst relaxing on a beach in Spain!

College – Pretty sure you'll know this one as you likely chose a specific college when you applied. Your tutorials are organised in college, and that's where you'll know your closest coursemates in first year. By comparison, lectures, and other centralised teaching, is organised by your faculty.

College Parents – Basically a buddy system, giving you a chance to meet other Freshers and also Second Years with wisdom to pass down!

Dean – The person who makes sure everyone is behaving, basically!

Domestic Bursar – They have a responsibility for every aspect of life outside of academia in college, such as accommodation.

Eights (VIIIIs) – Ahh the first rowing one. If you're like me, you're a bit out of your depth (pun intended) when it comes to rowing. However, Eights, or Summer Eights as is their full name, are the races that take place between colleges in Fifth Week of Trinity Term every year. They take place over four days, culminating in a very busy Saturday, often with very high turnout along the river to cheer your college on!

Life in Oxford

Fellows – Senior staff who, effectively, run the college. Ordinarily, you will have a fellow for each course at your college.

Finals – Don't worry, you won't be sitting them yet! These are, obviously, the exams at the end of your degree. Sometimes this can also be referred to as FHS (Final Honour School), which is just the papers that you're taking (which may be chosen in First Year, so handy to know!)

Formals – The fancy dinners you've been dreaming of! You get to dress up in gowns and be your dream Oxford student for an evening! (Except Wadham who don't have them, although dress-up dinners do exist, but this doesn't include gowns).

High Table – The table where important people in college dine, typically Fellows. I can't lie, I forgot this was a thing, but you may notice it during Freshers' Week at the Undergraduate Dinner!

Hilary Term – Second term of the academic year, running from January to March.

JCR – Junior Common Room. Confusingly, this refers to both the physical room, but also the student body, essentially a mini-student union at every college. JCR meetings will often be hosted in the physical space, in which you can vote and get involved in your college.

LMH – Lady Margaret Hall; a college in Oxford that is SO FAR AWAY and if you have a tute here, then my deepest apologies. (To be fair, I think a few colleges are far out, but LMH has adopted a reputation for it.)

Long Vac – Summer Holidays! Running from the end of June until the start of October, you finish and start later than your friends who may be at other universities, where they typically run from the end of May to mid-September.

Life in Oxford

Matriculation – One of the best days in Michaelmas! Basically graduation, but for starting university. You dress up in Subfusc for the first time, and then listen to the Vice Chancellor speak Latin at you, before running around taking photos with your friends. This one often takes place on the Saturday of 1st Week, but make sure to pay attention to emails from college.

Michaelmas Term – First term of the academic year, running from October to December.

Mods – Short for moderations, these are exams that take place in Hilary Term, rather than Trinity Term when most exams take place, and are sat by Law or Classics students. If you are a Law student, these will be in Hilary Term of your first year, however for Classics students, they are in Hilary Term of Second Year, leaving you exam free for the entirety of first year!

Noughth (0th) Week – The week before term officially starts. Oxford weeks start when teaching starts, so since there is no teaching in Freshers' Week, it is in Noughth Week of Michaelmas Term. Don't let the nought fool you though; despite noughth week being considered part of the vac, you will be expected back during it to sit collections most terms (hope you are getting the hang of the lingo!). Any week before 0th Week is in the negative e.g. Week -1 etc.

Oxford Comma – Okay, okay, I'm including this one as a member of a newspaper. But I also remember getting quizzed on my thoughts about the Oxford Comma in First Year and not having a clue what it was. It's basically adding an extra comma before "and". For example, "I bought an apple, a banana, and a cake", as opposed to "I bought an apple, a banana and a cake". Although it doesn't change anything in this example, it can be useful for changing the meaning in other contexts (plus helpful to know we use it, if you decide to join The Blue).

Life in Oxford

Pidge – Short for pigeon hole, which is where your post will go. This will likely be in your plodge, or in a mail room adjacent to it, depending on your college. Make sure to check there before Matriculation and before Prelims, as you'll have important things there too!

Plodge – A portmanteau of 'Porters' Lodge', these are at the entrance to college. As the name suggests, this is where you can find the porters, who are essentially the people who keep college safe and running. If you have any questions, queries, or accidentally lock yourself out of your room, make sure to go to them!

Prelims – Short for Preliminary examinations, these are exams at the end of First Year. They seem terrifying, but all you have to do is pass, and literally no-one cares as soon as you're in Second Year. I PROMISE you, they are not worth the stress (although do still revise!).

Rustication – Pausing your studies for a year and returning to the same point in the next academic year. This is rare and only in exceptional circumstances do people rusticate, generally health related. Hopefully you won't need to consider this, but it is good to know.

Sheldonian Theatre – Just off Broad Street, this is where you'll be matriculated!

SLC – Student Loans Company (VERY important one).

Student Union – Every university has one, so in all likelihood, you've probably heard of it. These are elected students who are chosen to represent the concerns of the student population. This is a centralised body, but your college may have their own, so make sure to keep your eyes peeled!

Subfusc – The gown, hat, and everything else you wear to Matriculation and your exams. Make sure you read the regulations carefully before arriving as they can be quite specific about what to wear (officially, although I don't know how much they mind in reality, but maybe don't test your luck!). The past two years, the regulations have been relaxed due to exams taking place during heatwaves; don't worry if it is nearing 40 degrees, they won't make you stay in a full suit. If you want my top tip, do NOT try to buy black skirts in Oxford before Matriculation as you won't find any. Trust me, I tried!

Life in Oxford

Teddy Hall – St. Edmund Hall's nickname. You will never hear it referred to by its full name, but the emails still are @seh, so don't get confused!

Trinity Term – This one is the summer term, running from late April to June. The most beautiful, and often, the most stressful. Still, nothing beats the sun beating down whilst you're walking in Christ Church Meadows!

Torpids – These are the rowing races that take place in Seventh Week of Hilary Term. They are generally less well attended than Summer Eights

Tute – A simpler (and more Oxfordian) way of saying 'tutorial'. These are small, personal sessions with your tutor, generally in a ratio no bigger than 3:1, in which you go over essays or problem sheets. They can seem intimidating, but PLEASE get involved. The more involved you are, the more you learn.

The Union – Very different to the Student Union. The (Oxford) Union is a debating society, for which you must pay to become a member, as with other student societies.

Univ – University College, but abbreviated!

Vac – short for vacations, these are the holidays, or in other words, when you're at home! The two that are in the middle of the academic year are sometimes referred to as the Christmas and Easter Vacs, and each run for six weeks.

Varsity Match – any sporting match that's played between Oxford and Cambridge.

Xth Week – All Oxford weeks are numbered. Each term has eight weeks of teaching, however the weeks after and before continue to count. Most would consider the cut off to be 11th Week, before looping back to Week -2 of the following term.

Information for Any Emergency at Uni that is Not A 'CALL THE PARENTS' Job

Molly Finch



Image Credit: Map Data ©Google 2026

Emergency contacts:

Dial **999** in the event of an emergency. You can also go to John Radcliffe Hospital's A&E, Headley Way, Headington OX3 9DU.

The hospital is open 24/7.

Contact for A&E: 0300 304 7777.

NHS **111** offers advice and support that is non-urgent, including mental health or wider health issues.

College Nurse :

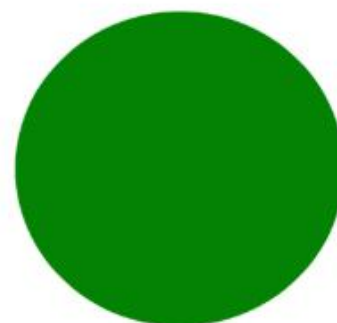
Furthermore, in the event of an illness or mental health issue, the nurse at your college can help. They will be provided as a contact for students in a college and are readily available via email for inquiries about how to access your GP or switch to different pharmacies, as well as for minor injuries. Please note that they are not a fix-all. If your leg is broken, the emergency services are the best point of contact.

The Safe Lodge College Scheme allows a student to get help from a college lodge if they are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at any time. College lodges participating in this scheme will have a **green circle** by the lodge entrance.

For Security Services, contact 01865 289 999. College Porters' Lodges often offer support 24/7 during term time.

Included within this scheme :

- All Souls
- Balliol
- Brasenose
- Christ Church
- Corpus Christi College
- Exeter
- Green Templeton
- Harris Manchester
- Hertford
- Jesus
- Keble
- Lady Margaret Hall
- Linacre
- Lincoln
- Magdalen
- Mansfield
- Merton
- New College
- Pembroke
- Queen's
- Regent's
- Reuben
- St Anne's
- St Antony's
- St Catherine's
- St Cross
- St Edmund
- St Hilda's
- St Hughes
- St John's
- St Peter's
- Somerville
- Trinity
- Univ
- Wadham
- Wolfson
- Worcester



A green circle,
indicating a Safe
Lodge.

Different times of day and night – Helplines

	8am	11am	12pm	2pm	4pm	6pm	8pm	10pm	12-8am
Nightline - Independent and run by students of Brookes and Oxford. 01865270270 or over text.									
Samaritans Open 24/7, 116 123									
SANEline – for anyone experiencing mental health or supporting someone with it – 0300 304 7000									
Oxfordshire Safe Haven – non-clinical service open every day offering listening support for those experiencing a mental health crisis.									
Shout – text SUNRISE to 85258									
DAS – Disability Advisory Service to access support regarding disabilities whether mental or physical.									

Sexual health services

As a fresher, The JCR Committee often includes a ‘Welfare Rep’ which involves safeguarding issues surrounding sexual welfare for anyone. Whilst these positions remain gendered to male/female, they are not limited to these areas, as sexual health concerns everyone, and everyone is welcome. Seeking advice or accompaniment to sexual health clinics remains confidential within these roles.

You can find this information on the NHS page for Oxford:

<https://www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk/>

Screening for sexual health is extremely important, especially within a university setting, in which access to sexual health care can be daunting.

Options to look after your own sexual health include:

- Booking an appointment
- Ordering a free STI kit to your accommodation
- Finding a clinic
- Getting free contraception

Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service

Oxford also provides excellent support for those who have experienced/are experiencing Sexual Harassment and Violence. The support service provides a safe space with caseworkers for guidance surrounding sexual harassment, violence, relationship abuse, coercive control, stalking, and more. This can be accessed at any point in any student’s life (even when suspended) for all genders or sexualities. This is, of course, a confidential service and the link to the online form can be found here: supportservice@admin.ox.ac.uk. This form does not require any information regarding what has happened.

Empowerment is the model of the organisation and there is a dedicated space for meeting caseworkers in the city centre or remote appointments can be organised via Microsoft Teams. Specialist case workers can be provided in connection to Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) and the local Rape Crisis centre, Survivor Space.

More information on this issue can be found at:
<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/supportservice/about>

Disability contacts

Coming to University is daunting, but for anyone who has experienced a disability this can sometimes add extra obstacles or things to think about when moving away from home. When starting Oxford, it can be important to register your disability with your college using the Disability Advisory Service. Even if, at the beginning of term, you feel as if you do not require any support, registering means that during your degree you can more easily find the support you need without having to fill in the forms when you are struggling. The university can also use the register to house you in fitting accommodation, or for any extra support you may need. You may not even realise that you can register with the service. A disability is any sensory or mobility impairment; a long term illness or physical health condition including eating disorders, anxiety and more. Additionally, this includes specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD, a social communication difficulty such as autism spectrum condition.

The DAS can be contacted on 01865 280459 or through email at disability@admin.ox.ac.uk. You can also visit them at 3 Worcester St OX1 2BX and attend a drop-in session. The service is open 9:00 to 17:00, Monday to Friday. This is an inclusive practice with compliance to legal responsibilities across the collegiate University.

Counselling and mental health

Oxford seeks to foster an environment of support and there are opportunities to request an appointment with a counsellor at counselling@admin.ox.ac.uk. This can be completed online or in person. Additionally, workshops and groups can be made available.

One of the heartening parts of a term at Oxford university is the focus on welfare weeks across the university. Midway through term, activities surrounding welfare are arranged through the welfare representatives at the colleges. This includes a reminder of who to contact if help is needed within the term and wholesome activities like movie nights or hot chocolate with movies.

Welfare teas are an integral part of the Oxford experience. Gathering together at a time each week round a table of snacks can provide an opportunity to check in with friends and socialise. It is an easy space to keep in touch with friends as well as the welfare reps in your college.

The support continues outside of term. Just because you are not at Oxford does not mean that the mental health support services end. There is also vacation welfare support that is accessible outside of term time.

Overall, the most important takeaway in regard to mental health is not to wait until it is too late. Do not question your suitability if you are considering accessing a mental health service. Anybody will be happy to help you at the times that they are available as signposted above. The same message extends to sexual health. Don't wait to check something if you have a concern – put your mind at rest through the range of confidential services and support available. The aim for this section is to make these services easily identifiable for use.

If you do need support, reach out at any time, whether to a tutor, friend, or family. **Nothing is too small, and everyone needs help sometimes.**

THE MAD HATTER

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A Final Word from *The Blue*:

Mya Sidhu (St Anne's, English)

Illustration by Mya Sidhu

After over one hundred pages... you've made it to the end of *The Oxford Blue's* Freshers' Guide for 2026!

At this point, I'd like to give a huge thanks to everyone involved in making this guide. First, thank you to our Senior Editors, who researched, wrote, and responded to edits of their articles in the middle of the long vac – whilst balancing work, internships, and their own personal time. This guide wouldn't be as incredible and informative without you!

Then, our amazing Editor-in-Chiefs, Jessica and Noah, without whom I wouldn't even know about *The Oxford Blue's* tradition of guides in the first place. They've worked *extremely* hard to oversee the direction of the guide, to edit articles day-in and day-out, and to put the whole thing together as you see it now. Thanks to them, you hopefully know everything there is to be known about Oxford before (or while) you're here. I hope sincerely, whether you have qualms about uni life or not, that you've found it useful.

As Managing Director of *The Oxford Blue*, I join our EiCs in giving you a huge congratulations on your acceptance into the University of Oxford, and hope you look forward to the experience as much as possible! (Perhaps even joining us...?) There really is nothing else like it, and only a year in myself – despite the trials and tribulations – I'm coming into my second year with experiences I only thought would be only possible in a Netflix Original film.

One way or another, Oxford *will* take you out of your comfort zone. I assure you that it feels amazing. Thank you for reading this Freshers' Guide. Enjoy yourself here, and my final advice, do not forget to sleep. (I do not kid when I say I fall into naps against my will here.)



Me at Matriculation.

Let this be a warning to take more pictures of yourself if you end up as MD of a newspaper.

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