

The Power of Opportunity with Oxford's Vice Chancellor

Oxford's Future Through Student Eyes

Transcript

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Hello and welcome to the Oxford Student Voices, the Oxford Student Union podcast where students and universities meet in open conversation. My name is Wantoe Teah. Wantoe. I'm the President for Postgraduate at Oxford Student Union. The podcast is a special project from our office created to bring university services and leadership closer to the student union and tutors, closer to every student voice. Oxford has always been shaped by conversation across colleges, across disciplines, and across generations. With this series, each episode looks to extend that tradition by opening a clear line between students and the people who guide our university, making space for question, clarity, and shared purpose. It is therefore fitting that our inaugural guest is no one else but the incredible vice counselor, Professor Aaron Tracy, CBE, FRS, FMSC, I don't know if I get it right, but that's really incredible. With her background, her story is rooted in Oxford, from her study in biochemistry year to her post-doctoral work at Harvard, and then back to Oxford, where she co-founded the FRRB Century and later led the Northfield Department of Clinical Neurosciences. She has served as warden of Melton College and is internationally recognized for pioneering neuroscience research on pain and anesthesia. Access to Oxford has widened from Opportunity Oxford, the Ashkura Foundation Year, and the Academic Future Year. It's also very important to recognize that scholarship, record fundraising, has supported projects such as the Swarthman Center and the Humanities and Life and Mind Building. But milestones always come with responsibility. Like every world-class institution, Oxford must navigate financial pressure, rising student cost of living, while ensuring well-being and inclusion remain at the heart of a mission. It must respond to the Pace of change brought by artificial intelligence, and it must also ensure that students can address different hurdles of challenges. These are not weaknesses, but opportunities, and the university is incredibly growing for it under the leadership of our vice counselor. To this end... I'm so excited to talk about opportunities to student us and with the VC here, giving us the opportunity to be the first inaugural guest. Vice Chancellor, it's such a privilege to begin this podcast series with you as our inaugural guest. Before we dive in, how are you today and what excites you most about engaging with students in a podcast like this?

Irene Tracey

I am well Wantoe and please call me Irene. Let's drop the formalities. But congratulations to you for coming up with this really great idea to do podcasts and to share information more fluidly between sort of, you know, leadership and the student body. I think it's a really great idea. So delighted to be your inaugural guest.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Thank you. It's such a really great privilege also having you as our inaugural guest. You know, you've done incredible work around engagement. champion free speech with the Vice Council of the Symposium. And then also you host the Firewall podcast. So this is not new to you. Oxford was ranked the number one university in the world for the nerve consecutive year. Beyond the prestige, what does this achievement mean for students? and how can it translate into real opportunities for both undergraduates and postgraduates?

Irene Tracey

Well, it's really important. You know, we rankings, as you say, we're thrilled to be 9 consecutive years. We'll have the announcement next month as to whether we've made an even bigger record-breaking 10th. I remain very hopeful and optimistic. And it's a huge credit to the staff and the students that of course make that ranking so good and has sustained it for all these years. And it's a great reflection of the quality of the students we attract, the work they do, what they go on and become in the world and contribute, what our academics are doing in terms of the teaching and the environment that they create for our students to thrive and of course the research that we do and the impact. So all of that is what goes into the different rankings and different rankings, focus on different things. So it's important when you're running a big institution, you run it based on your core principles and your values. You're not buffeted by what the rankings want and what they're doing. But of course, it's always very pleasing when one does well in it. But you know, you don't get sort of hijacked by the ranking system. So there's a balance that you have to play between their importance, but also staying core to your values and your longer term mission about what you're trying to achieve here as an academic teaching and research institute.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

I definitely agree. And as a student at Oxford, that's primarily one of our biggest part. I'm looking forward to celebrating the 10th as well. Let's hope. There's a lot with your personal journey. It's just really incredible. Your own journey begin here as a biochemist student and later as a doctoral researcher. How did Oxford shape your opportunities at that time? And what do you hope today's student can experience that was not available when you, took your own journey here at Oxford as well?

Irene Tracey

Yeah, well, it's, you're dredging my memory cells now because I'm 58, nearly 59. So we're going back 40 years when I had the good fortune of being given a place to come here to study. I went to a local comprehensive school, Gosford Hill School in Kidlington, which is just outside of Oxford, a wonderful school. It was, again, terrific at encouraging students to want to think about if university was something they want to pursue, to pursue that. And for me, I was very much encouraged to think about Oxford as a place that I could aspire to go to. I was very fortunate to be given a place here and it transformed my life. And so there is no doubt, you know, I often say that one of the reasons I have taken on leadership roles in the university, whether running a department or running my old college, or indeed now as VC running the university, is because I want to give back to a place that gave me absolutely everything. Without this opportunity that created my whole fantastic enjoyment of life as a career scientist, none of that would have been happened if I hadn't got this opportunity to walk through the doors of my old college. And that was very much what motivated me to go back to run Merton was to give back because there was at Merton, I was an undergraduate and graduate.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

That's really impressive. And you probably definitely understand the student culture with social background, being a student, then rising to being the vice counsellor is such a journey. And when I think about opportunities in that length, you present the best kind of explanation to how Oxford could be a powerful opportunities for students. One of the unprecedented space that I definitely have seen is the Swapman Center for Humanities, such a milestone project. And I did two master at Oxford. They master in public policy and then compare it to international education. So the idea of a progressive futuristic research center at the Swapman Center, it's something that I definitely would love you to talk a bit about. It is probably one of the most ambitious projects in Oxford history. but what would it mean for student experience and how do you see a reshaping teaching, research and cultural life at Oxford?

Irene Tracey

Yeah, no, well, that's a lot of questions. I could spend the rest of the podcast just talking about that opportunity. So the Shortson Centre for the Humanities is open, which is exciting. So it just opened a couple of weeks ago. Students and staff and faculty are all moving in at the moment. Thousands and thousands of books going into the dedicated library there, people settling into their new workspace. And I'm delighted that the new students will be arriving. driving this Michaelmas term to start their journey in the humanities. Seven different faculties moving in there will be in the Schulzon Centre for their learning. So it's going to create an environment where we can bring together all the

humanities. We can make sure that students are enjoying their subject in its isolation whilst also having the benefits of ease of connecting with other subjects in the humanities for that interdisciplinary conversation and co-learning and co-working. And then to create physical spaces where we make that opportunity for exchanging ideas just really, really easy. It is a stunningly beautiful building. It's one of our most special new buildings that we've created. We're very, very grateful to Steve Schwartzman for the enormous donation, the record donation in the university's history that has facilitated our ability to build this. And at a time when the humanities are under pressure financially, with many universities having to contract their offer or for redundancies to be hitting largely social science and humanities, it's really important that places like Oxford step up and say, not on our watch. On our watch, we are going to proudly raise money, put money, prioritize and support the humanities. And we're going to go big with a huge building that we celebrate the humanities and we use it not just for the benefit of the students, but the students are of course a great visibility and great role models for other students, young students at primary school and secondary school. So the extra thing about the centre is it will have this huge public space that will very easily allow the public to come in. and see and understand more what the humanities mean. Why is it important for us to defend the humanities, to understand the humanities, to understand what it is to be human, past and present and future, particularly at a time of AI, coming more and more into our lives. We have to remember what it is to be human, and that's what the humanities give us. So it's an ambitious ask of this building, but it's fit for the, it's fit for that ambition.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

And that's something we all can be able to celebrate. It's not just ambitious, but it was done.

Irene Tracey

It's done on time. Well, and in fact, ahead of time and on budget, which is always a very pleasing thing for a vice chancellor.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Very impressive. And you mentioned something that I definitely want us to be able to go to the artificial intelligence. a very big subject. And even though I'm not an expert, I definitely know that it's a very, huge project, futuristic project for the university. I'd definitely love to know the rise in artificial intelligence that is currently reshaping every field. How is Oxford preparing students not only to adapt to the changes, but also to lead responsibly in a world where AI could be transformative? but it could also be a caution.

Irene Tracey

Yeah, no, it's a great question. And again, these are great questions, Wantoe, and we could spend all the time on each one of these. So, I mean, students are very advanced, probably more so than many of the faculty in terms of using AI and knowing what it is, because there's definitely a generational thing. I've been really impressed as we've started to really get a better understanding of just what's going on. Oxford is a very bottom-up structure. So I'm really pleased to see actually the huge amount of just organic bottom-up use and implementation and piloting of AI that is happening anyway by faculty, by students, both in terms of using it for research, using it for teaching, and just everyday life. So we're doing an awful lot of it and have been for a while. And there is no doubt this is one of the biggest disruptive technologies that's come to the world, you know, since the Industrial Revolution. It is much bigger than that and it's happening faster than that. So I don't think people have quite got their heads around just what a big change this is bringing to society. And we as an academic institution that is both doing the basic research of AI and developing and have development in the algorithms that's the basis of it and going forwards doing the same, we will play our part in not just driving the new ways that AI are being developed, but how they are being applied again in a research context, chemistry, drug development, decoding ancient manuscripts, whatever it might be, as well as thinking about how we can implement it into our teaching and our learning.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Yeah. And another critical aspect that you highlighted is this student. And primarily, as a post-grad and undergrad student, I think about access and inclusion. Initiatives like Opportunity Oxford, we had it, Very interesting, a few days ago, we presented the Oxford, there was a fair for Opportunity at Oxford with new incoming students. And it was just amazing seeing the diversity of students there from different backgrounds and just very excited by getting to Oxford, but also from very unprecedented challenges. And initiated Opportunity at Oxford, the Ashkura Foundation year, academic future scholarships, look to widen access at the university. I'd definitely love for us to be able to talk a bit about what progress have you seen so far and what is your vision for how these initiatives can grow. Probably, I'll probably post a few more initiatives in it, like a four scholarship. It's really amazing. This year, there's more than 88 scholars that are incoming from Africa. And as an African, that's really incredible. in terms of how they return with very mind-boggling experience to shape the continent. But it's beyond just our faults, but how does the university look to achieve? access in our current world.

Irene Tracey

Yeah, no, it's a great question and the strides have been, terrific and I'm, grateful to my predecessors as well who've been very focused on this and the data speaks for itself in

terms of where we were and where we are right now. And as I often say, talent is everywhere but opportunity is not and it's our job to make sure that students who want to come to Oxford don't feel there's any barriers for them to want to apply. So we have programmes now along the whole path from primary school to early secondary to mid-secondary to 6th form, all the way up to coming. And, you know, we're seeing that is having impact. You are changing the course of direction of a child's life. by setting that ambition, that aspiration, by providing some extra tools and kits for the teachers as well as for the students, there's more we can do and we will keep doing that. I'm particularly proud of our Fox, as you know, it won my Vice Chancellor's Outstanding Award last year. In fact, I just met with Anne, who's been a great, great, you know, champion of it for 10 years just this morning. And she's just been an extraordinary ambassador for the programme. And we will continue, you know, with again, scholarship funding, generous by the Mastercard Foundation. We have many of our wonderful alum who again give back and philanthropically help support scholarships. So there's many different ways that we need to continue that access because our job is to bring the best of the best here and then to, as I often would say, you take that beautiful brilliant mind and then our job is to develop it and mould it so that we add value to it. Off you go into the world and make the world a better place. But the new thing going forward is a little bit more around what we've also learned, which is when students do come from backgrounds where maybe their schooling hasn't been able to give them as much of the content as some other students coming in, we've got to help them so that they do thrive on course very quickly. So onboarding, on course provision of extra skills extra learning ahead of coming. These are things that we're really focused on now in this next phase of our access participation plan is how can we make sure that we skill up very quickly and we provide extra on-course provision so that every student thrives when they're here.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

I'm a firm believer in intergenerational leadership, specifically intergenerational conversation, because there's so much to learn from the other folks. And I do also think that there's a complex governance system at the university in terms of leading. So I just would love to think about your experience navigating this system. What are the challenges? How do you balance that with your vision and your objective for the university?

Irene Tracey

Yeah, it's another great question, Monto. You should do this as a career. So I'm of the system, so I'm comfortable with the fact that we have a system that is incredibly complex and devolved with lots of autonomous units, with the colleges all independent charities. As a department head, you have a lot of control of your overhead stream and your budget. And that's quite unusual. Most universities are very centralized in command and control. Oxford is not. And I often joke that you'd never set it up like this

now. I love it and I think it is what makes Oxford special and it's what makes us really cutting edge because actually it means that you've got lots of ability to be really innovative and entrepreneurial within the institution, which means we're always changing. We might look like we're rigid and... static from the outside because of the stone structures of our walls of the colleges and their buildings. But inside it's just this hotbed of change and innovation because you have a lot of authority as a college head or as a department head to do things and to change things. And you've not got some big ogre centrally telling you can't. So that's the magic of the place and that is really important. You know, people don't think of Vox as being very innovative and entrepreneurial inside, but it really is, it's what's kept me here as an academic for 37 years. You're really free to do things and that keeps us fresh. So that's great. We've spent 1000 years perfecting that model to work as a governance structure. So it works because we've spent a long time making it work. If you set it up now, it'd be chaos. It's not chaos. I think, as I've often said before publicly in speeches, it works because at core, everybody's really really clear about what their purpose is. And their purpose is to provide an outstanding education from outstanding academics who are also to outstanding students and those academics also doing outstanding research to make impact in the world to knowledge and to, again, health and wealth. And that's it. And we're all really signed up to that. So in some ways, we all move in one direction miraculously when we could be going in 150 different directions, but we don't. because we're very, very clear what our core sense of purpose and values are.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

And it brings me into one of my favorite questions today, which is student leadership. As a student leader, I do believe that students today are more engaged, globally-minded and vocal in leadership. They have increasingly leveraged their demand on transparencies and answer from the university. How do you see the new wave of student leadership influencing OXO and how can the university embrace it positively? And that's also with the SU.

Irene Tracey

Yeah, no, it's great. And you know, I'm always, you know, students have always wanted to take leadership roles and we're grateful because at the end of the day, we're self-governing. We're self-governing as an institution. we're self-governing as a student body. So it's really important that students step up and they take on those leadership roles. And as I've said to you and to your colleagues in the student union, both current and past and, you know, captains of sports and people who are leading orchestras and whatever, or being directors of dramas, whatever they're doing, thank you. Thank you deeply for taking on that role and responsibility. taking time out of, your life and your studies to do that. Because without you, we wouldn't, be able to drive the student body forward and offer students all these great things. So, we're self-governing, which means

people have to step up and do it. And therefore, we've always had student leadership. But there's more opportunities now, I think, for students. There's more societies, there's more clubs, there's more, I think, you know, design appetite to also contribute, you know, to again, that student body through taking on leadership roles. And I think one of the, extra benefits that come is the skills that you learn. I mean, part of being a student in a university is, of course, to get your degree, but it's also to learn what is it you want to do with your life, and to take on and go and join clubs and societies and find out what your thing might be. And you, you're here to also explore what might be your career for the rest of your life. And you're not going to know that if you don't try different things. And you can always stop something. So I always say to people, don't, there's very few things in life you can't stop. So just go and try stuff. Because by really putting yourself out of your comfort zone and trying new things, whether that's taking on a leadership role or joining a club where somebody's, you know, leading it, that's how you're going to discover whether, you know, you want to be this or that in the rest of your life for your career. So the student experience is all that as well as obviously the degree, as well as meeting people from other parts of the country and other parts of the world, sharing knowledge and having that ability to then for the rest of your lives being informed by again. those student exchanges. So it's these skills that you, when you take on, say, a leadership role in that and you're providing an environment for students to again to find their thing, you're also learning other skills that again you can take out into your career. Who knows where you'll end up one day. I can't wait to see. But I'm sure you'll draw back on the experiences you've had taking on this role and the challenges that no doubt you will have, particularly in the student union, undergoing its transformation. So grateful to Eleanor and Lauren last year for all that they did. You guys into that role now, continuing with the transformation program. It's going to be bumpy. It always is. But very optimistic for what you're going to be able to achieve.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Part of the reason why we established this podcast is, you know, to meet the needs of students in that manner. To some extent, demystifying what governance and leadership at the university is, but providing them that interaction. I think this is a testament We are extremely grateful for your acceptance to be the inaugural guest on this podcast. It's a testament for your choice and belief in the student union objective to be. accessible to students and to be able to provide this kind of learning experience on the university systems.

Irene Tracey

You guys, I'm so grateful to you for, again, taking on these roles. They're not easy roles to take on. I know that you share my mission that the Student Union has to be there for the students. And, you know, I do student breakfasts and student dog walks. I meet out and about in all sorts of different ways. And there's no doubt it's been bumpy, you know,

for, you know, the students. wanting the student union to provide more for them and be more of a voice for their needs with the common room. So, this, ambition for us to shape the student union, it might not end up in the shape that we've currently got. We'll see. It's a pilot. Either way, we're on this journey now to make sure that in the, you know, the coming year in the next few years, we will make the student union there to deliver for the students. And I know Wonta, you share that ambition as to your colleagues. And I'm absolutely by your side every seven of the way to make sure that we get there, because it must be something that's there for the benefit of the students.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Thank you. And the other aspect I want us to be able to shed light on is global Oxford and the international community. So there are more than 40% of Oxford students comes from Oxford, the UK, like me, as an international student. This is an unprecedented privilege, but also opportunity in reaching the university cultural and global reach. How is Oxford working to ensure that international students feel fully supported, able to belong and connected to lasting opportunities now and after the graduation?

Irene Tracey

Yeah, it's a great point that you make about how, particularly I think with some of the commentary that is out there, you know, and has been out there for several years in the media and beyond about, which can give a sense of international students not being welcome. in Britain or at universities. And of course, universities are working very hard to make sure that the international student community know you are absolutely welcome here. We hugely benefit from your presence and that ability for us to create soft understanding and soft diplomacy between the international students at a very critical stage of your careers, as well as British students' careers, that you will get to know each other. And that is the way you create stable societies. That's the way you create understanding between peoples. And the universities provide a great a great sort of crucible and a melting pot to bring students in at a very formative stage of their careers and get to know each other, as well as obviously doing the teaching, the research. But we provide this soft diplomacy, if you like. And I see the impact of that when I do my alumni visits out in the world, whether it's in Asia, whether it's in North America, whether it's in Europe. The devotion that our international students have to the university, but also to Britain for the time that they spent here. They take a little bit of Britain away with them and it lasts forever. It's so impressive. It was only, often students were only here for a little bit of time. But I don't think sometimes, you know, people appreciate just how important that experience has been for the international students. and how grateful they are and how much they've enjoyed their time. And that is lasting for the rest of their lives. And that has to be a good thing, as well as the huge benefits you bring to the British students who are here. So again, Oxford is very heavily British as

an undergraduate level. You were speaking about 40%, that's sort of on average. But if we split undergraduates, 15,000, about, you know, 70% of them are UK. So we're one of the higher UK undergraduate universities. At a graduate level, it's more 60% international, 40% UK, so 65% maybe. So it goes a lot more international at a graduate level. So on average, then you end up with that figure. So 2 quite different experiences and having been an undergraduate, undergraduate here, they were very different experiences even 40 years ago, uniquely because it was two very different types of communities that I socialized with and studied with between my undergraduate experience and my graduate experience. And that was fantastic. And I'm sure that's the case for students now. Very, very different. So what must we do? Well, we've got to keep encouraging students to want to come and study here. Luckily, we're not seeing any lack of appetite for international students around the world to want to come to Oxford. Thank heavens, that's wonderful. We've got to make sure it's easy for them to come. So again, working with the government in terms of visa restrictions and other aspects like that, so, important to do that. We've got to make sure that things like the levy are not done because that will be really prohibitive. So we're working again to make sure that the levy ideally is removed. in terms of a levy on international students, working on funding to support bursaries and scholarships to facilitate students to come. All of these are the different ways that, again, we're working actively to make sure that we see no shortage or any detriment to both the ability to come as an international student and then the ability to have a great time here so that when I see them again going forward as an alum, they've had just as good a time as previous international students.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Thank you. That's a really incredible answer. And when I was thinking about this question, I thought about the current, you know, growing polarizations, especially when it comes to international students. And I do think a lot of international students will feel refreshed just by listening to your words of reassurance, which is very important in terms of this. With the SU, one of our primary objectives also is to be able to enhance diversity and inclusion events. Sharon is working on a couple of events for Black History Month. And we also have the community C funding, which Shema is working on to be able to build different societies and programs at the university to work on enhancing their program. And I'm very confident that we will be able to go stronger in this movement as well. The future vision of Oxford, which is very important. I know, of course, every day you think about your legacy, which is pretty much very unprecedented right now. We spoke about the Swapman program, which is one of the most ambitious programs at Oxford. But I know you're not stopping. You still have a lot. So I definitely will be, and I know we all will be very much interested in looking ahead the next decade when future students reflect on your time as far as counselor. What is

the change or opportunity you hope will define your legacy that will shape Oxford tomorrow?

Irene Tracey

Well, many people in my position, these are the hardest questions to answer, partly because you're so focused on making sure everything's running well. You don't tend to take a step back and think, well, what do I want my legacy to be? And you sort of think that's far too grand a thing to say. But what, this is maybe an unusual answer. You know, there's many things I'm doing. I'm a fast, I'm a high energy, I have great ambitions for this place. I love the bones of it. And there's many things I've set in train that, you know, we're doing. But if I had to distill it down to one, one of the projects that we've been really working very hard on is how do we use the great strength of this University of Oxford and its great global brand to help Britain at this point in time and the United Kingdom. So obviously we want to maintain its position in the global rankings and doing our fantastic impactful research for the benefit of mankind. That is a given that I call the day job. In terms of something it's different for what the students might experience going forward and look back and say that feels different to when I was here, when you were here, in terms of what I've set in train when I've left. It would be the ability for our students to stay in Oxford Now what do I mean by that? I mean by that, of course, we have many students stay on to do further research. They might stay on as academics. But if you don't stay on an Oxford as part of the university, you pretty much go. you leave because there's not that much more you could do around the region and the city. I want to build an innovation ecosystem connecting up with the Cambridge and London and a supercluster and connecting up with, again, our collaborations with Birmingham and we're hoping to connect up with other parts up across the whole of the United Kingdom to think about how do we create an innovation ecosystem that makes it incredibly attractive for our students who are gown to also become town because they want to stay in Oxford, not because they're staying on for higher degrees or they're working at the university, but because there are an unbelievable amount of opportunities of jobs and businesses and things that have been born from the university, our spin outs, our new companies, our new discovery engine is creating opportunities that are so attractive that this great talent pool that we bring in every single year that we lose. A good chunk of them want to stay and they want to be part of this knowledge town. They want to contribute their knowledge to this great city and region and the country at this point in time. So that sort of divide between town and gown I've been working very hard on and I would very much like going forward from the student lens and experience that it becomes almost a no-brainer that your choice is, do I stay in Oxford, maybe as a student doing more work or as an academic? But equally, do I stay in Oxford because I'd like to work for that company? Or, that's just as an equal balanced decision as maybe going back, to your hometown or wherever it is, or going abroad. And we're not

there yet because too many of our wonderful, talented students leave the city and the region. I'd like to hold on to them.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

That's very, very amazing. And I think Beyond that, we just have final questions. Can't imagine we're almost done, but this has been really amazing. And the final question is more about undergraduate and postgraduate opportunities. I like to talk about issues like staying in Oxford also. I mean, we made tremendous progress in terms of staying in Oxford, but I do think there's still more we can be able to do in terms of supporting students that year. On a undergraduate, some undergraduate feel that their time at Oxford is short and very intense. While postgraduate face, you need pressure, balancing research, teaching, career planning, even sometimes funding as well. What is the university doing to expand opportunities that support both groups in terms of ensuring that they can try fear also?

Irene Tracey

Yeah, no, it's a, so well, we have a campaign. starting this at the end of this year, early next year, a development campaign. Every 15 or so years, 20 years, we do a big push for fundraising. We do very well philanthropically. It's a fantastic couple of years. But every 15, 20 years, we do another big push. And that's coming on my watch. So we're launching up for that. And I've set a very ambitious target of a billion pounds for graduate scholarships for that. Because if we're going to compete with my counterparts in the US in particular for graduates and the best graduates from wherever, we've got to be able to offer full funding if you get a spot here. And we don't at this point in time. Now, we offer about 1/3 of our graduates get funding through scholarships and bursaries. That's great, but it's got to be the whole lot. A billion will get us closer, won't do the whole lot. We keep going, we keep going. But that is a clear marker of what we're doing and the ambition to make sure that we're helping a student want to stay on, say, from undergraduate to graduate work without any prohibition around funding. And we will continue again with undergraduate bursaries and other aspects. That's the sort of financial side of things. And of course, then we're always mindful, and this is a plea to the students, fill in your student surveys. You know, if we don't know what you think and what you need, it's very hard for us to then prioritise, you know, what efforts we need to make to help support students' needs when they're here. So it's really important that people engage the student union, that they provide you, Wantoe, and your colleagues with feedback, that they fill in the student surveys, because as you will learn going through the year, it really does get fed back up in the structures and then it helps us decide what is it we need to divert and what we need to prioritise so that we're meeting the current student needs and we're keeping really fresh on that and really on top of it. So again, that's a plea for the students listening. If you're still listening to fill in those surveys, you know, make sure you talk to the student union, make sure that we are

aware of what it is that you need and think about also not just your needs, project what the next student in your shoes would want in the next three to five years. Because things in a big institution like this, it's obviously going to take a, takes a while. You can't do things on a flip of a coin in a day just because the sheer normity of the place. So you need to be mindful that, you know, for something to have an impact, it might take, you know, a little while, in which case you need to project also what was your needs and what do you think the next student's needs will be? And then let us know and then we can get that in place.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Definitely. And then with this time, I would definitely give you a moment to say a final words to students, incoming students, current students.

Irene Tracey

Well, thank you. I mean, just for those who are coming in, welcome. Absolutely, you know, fantastic to have you here. Congratulations on making it here. It's a really, really tough place to get into. So you've done exceptionally well to hear. You're going to be given an opportunity of a lifetime. So use it well, use it wisely. Make sure you stay on your studies, keep the pressure pressure on all the time, but also have fun. Have a lot of fun and make sure that you take advantage of all the amazing opportunities that, again, your college and your department will present to you and the student union. I look forward to interacting with many of you and welcoming you in different formats. And for those who are coming to the last eight years or the mid-years, again, welcome back. Have a great, academic year, a great term. For those who are looking out now for jobs and things, best of luck with the job interviewing and all the rest of it. Tough times at the minute, but I wish you all the very best. And make sure, you know, all of you look out for each other. Peer support is really important. So, you know, look out for each other, support each other, be kind. I always say it's underestimated kindness. Be kind to each other and let's have a really great academic year.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Great. Thank you so much. I hope we can do another podcast again maybe before the end of this year.

Irene Tracey

That'd be nice. Let's bookend it.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Yeah, at the end.

Irene Tracey

Okay, thanks.

Wantoe T. Wantoe

Thank you so much, Honorable Vice Chancellor. Thank you for sharing your insight, your vision with us today. It has been a true honor to open this podcast series with you as our inaugural guest and to hear your reflection on Oxford achievement, the opportunities available to students, and the future we are building together. To our listeners, our Oxford Student Voice is a student-led podcast series by the Oxford Student Union. It was created to bring university leadership and services closer to students and to ensure that student voices remains at the core of our decision-making process. Each episode is a chance to ask questions, share a perspective, and imagine an Oxford that is inclusive, ambitious, and student-focused. We hope you will join us on this journey as we continue to explore the pathways and possibilities that shape life at Oxford. My name is Wantoe Tia Wantoe, and I've been your host for this episode of Oxford Student Voices with the Vice Counselor. This podcast only lives and grows if it's shaped by you, the students. Share it with your friends, leave a comment with your thoughts, and let us keep building this space together. One conversation, one idea, one voice at a time. Thank you so much.