

WELCOME FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR



John Cairns/University of Oxford Images

One of the defining characteristics of Oxford is its inexhaustible curiosity. We are a university that wants urgently to know and understand things; all sorts of things, as this annual review illustrates. We want to know because we are deeply interested, and we want to know because with knowledge comes the possibility of change and improvement. That in turn helps us and others to do both completely new things and old things in better ways.

So I hope this annual review will give you at least a flavour of the Oxford of today, of its aspirations and achievements, and how we are going about achieving our core mission of outstanding teaching and research. And, by the way, we are delighted again this year to be able to do so not only in words and photos, but in video as well.

You can find out here about a few of the exciting and important developments over a twelve-month period in the life of our University. Among them are the launch of the Blavatnik School of Government and the arrival of its first intake of students, the next phase in the development of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, and some of the new acquisitions of our outstanding museums and collections. With a focus on research, we examine two areas among many to represent the quality and importance of the work currently being done at Oxford: developing gene therapy for people with an inherited type of progressive blindness; and a discovery of communities of previously unknown species on Antarctica's sea floor. And that theme of reaching out into new areas continues in our focus on the student experience and a profile of one of the first two Indigenous Australian students to matriculate at Oxford.

The free thinking and spirit of open enquiry that is in Oxford's DNA is anything but free in a financial sense, when done with the disciplined rigour and intensity on which we are proud to insist. So, as we seek to satisfy Oxford's curiosity, and to provide new answers to challenging problems, we also work exceptionally hard to ensure that we have the resources to carry forward our quest for fresh and better understanding of the often baffling world we share.

That is why the Oxford Thinking campaign is so important.

In March 2012, the Campaign passed its initial target and, as I write, the total amount raised exceeds £1.4 billion. We highlight here the extraordinary generosity of our benefactors. This included the biggest gift for undergraduate financial support in European history, from Michael Moritz and his wife Harriet Heyman, which will – in time – generate an unprecedented total of £300 million. We were also proud to benefit from the visionary philanthropy of Mrs Mica Ertegun, whose gift is the largest for graduate support in the Humanities in Oxford's 900-year history.

These magnificent Campaign contributions and the many thousands of other gifts, small and large, constitute a wonderful platform for the University. But we have to continue to build on it, which is why we are setting an ambitious new target of £3 billion. It is a lot of money but, as I have remarked elsewhere, I am sure we can do it – and frankly we have to do it because it represents the essential down payment on the future aspirations and achievements of our University.

We have also announced this year a major new initiative designed to ensure the most talented graduate students from all over the world can benefit from what Oxford has to offer. The Oxford Graduate Scholarship Matched Fund set out with an endowment goal of £100 million (£40 million from University funds to encourage and partner £60 million from philanthropic giving) – a sign of our determination to do everything we can to bridge the yawning graduate funding gap.

We believe deeply in what we do at Oxford and in its benefits for individuals and societies alike. That is why we strive always to do it better. But sometimes it is important to have our self-belief affirmed and set in another context. We were given just such an opportunity during the summer when one of our most distinguished and admired alumni, Aung San Suu Kyi, was finally able to receive her honorary degree in person at a memorable Encaenia ceremony in the Sheldonian Theatre. Recalling her long house arrest in Burma, Daw Suu spoke of her student memories of Oxford: 'These were among the most important inner resources that helped me to cope with all the challenges I had to face... Oxford is a place of tremendous broad-mindedness... Every human being is expected to have a value and a dignity of her kind or his kind. And that's why throughout the years when I was struggling for human rights in Burma I felt I was doing something of which my old university would have approved.'

It would, I think, be hard to find a more inspiring endorsement of what Oxford aspires to mean for the modern world.

Professor Andrew Hamilton, FRS

