

Last week it was reported that the number of suspensions ('rustications') had increased 68.57% since 2011, with students from the north, BME and international backgrounds, as well as state schools, being more likely to suspended their studies.

It should be noted at the outset that there is no shame in suspending your studies. For some people it is the right thing to do in their situation, and will benefit them in the long run. However, that being said, rustication should be a last resort. It should be considered only after all other avenues of support have been exhausted, and all the other options have been discussed.

There are any number of reasons someone might choose to rusticate, ranging from mental health issues to financial strains to disciplinary measures. There can be no way to tell for what reason the 68.57% more students decided to suspend their studies, but it seems logical that those from disadvantaged backgrounds would be more likely to for financial reasons than the average white, London-based privately educated Oxford student.

Oxford University's lack of diversity is well known and I will resist the temptation to elaborate on it here, but the fact that these statistics have revealed that students from certain backgrounds are more likely to suspend highlights the enduring inequality in the education system as a whole. Those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds do not receive the support - whether it be financial or emotional - they need in order to access the same opportunities as their counterparts.

Furthermore, the disproportionate number of state school pupils rusticating underlines an important correlation between educational background and settling in at Oxford. Whilst coming to Oxford from a private school may come as a shock to the system, at most of these institutions pupils have been adjusted to time away from home, living with other people and have, more often than not, been far better prepared for the academic intensities of a degree. I'm not denying that a number of private schools have extensive access and outreach programmes, offering bursaries to students from minority and underrepresented backgrounds. These are laudable efforts and should be encouraged, but such schemes are beside the point - the simple fact is that even those who attend these institutions on a bursary or the like will be better prepared for Oxford life, and the university ought to do something to minimise this disparity.

The statistics also revealed that students from certain causes were more likely to rusticate, with Oriental Studies topping the list (30% of students since 2006) followed by Archaeology and Anthropology (16% of students since 2006). Surely the implication here is a link to the difficulty of the degree - though when asked what course is the most challenging, Oriental Studies, Archaeology and Anthropology and Human Sciences are somewhat unlikely to come to mind.

Yet isn't this simply because they are not the 'mainstream' degrees? Oriental Studies is a particularly intense course, spanning a wide breadth and involving mastery of a (usually incredibly complicated) language. Oriental Studies also involves more contact hours than many of the other humanities, and so any essays students are given must be fitted in around a busy schedule of language classes and seminars.

On a similar note, perhaps the intensity of joint honours such as Archaeology and Anthropology is under-appreciated. Many students report that the cooperation of the two faculties to be less than ideal, fundamentally owing to a lack of communication.

The evidence is there, yet the university have done little to minimise the risks. The numbers indicate a failure to properly investigate the causes of rustication, and then to put the protocols and preventative measures in place to resolve them. Admittedly, it is almost universally understood that an Oxbridge degree will be high-pressure - we know what we've signed up for. However, if a student is pushed so far as rustication because they feel they cannot cope with their degree, surely something as elementary as improving communication between faculties is well within the university's ability. Oxford demands its students to keep on top of their administration, yet seems to be deficient in much of its own.

Even though these numbers obviously suggest otherwise, the university claims the number of students rusticating to have been 'broadly steady' since 2011. Whilst I will concede that the

numbers do blend together a range of situations that are hardly comparable, on a fundamental level, the fact that suspensions are on the rise should be enough to spur the university into action. The disproportionate number of BME, international, northern and state school students choosing to suspend their studies reflects a long-standing issue in Oxford's attentiveness to these students' situations, and highlights the lack of welfare measures in place to deal with them.

*J Lonergan, 2018*

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