

# Gender Equality Report

New College 2016

---

by Sophie Eager & Camille White (students),  
with a foreword by the College Equality Officers

## Table of Contents

<b><u>FOREWORD BY THE COLLEGE EQUALITY OFFICERS</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>
<b><u>KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COLLEGE</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>
<b><u>STUDENT PERSPECTIVE</u></b>	<b><u>7</u></b>
<b><u>ADMISSIONS</u></b>	<b><u>8</u></b>
<b><u>ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE</u></b>	<b><u>11</u></b>
ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE	11
SOCIAL EXPERIENCE	14
<b><u>EXAM PERFORMANCE</u></b>	<b><u>16</u></b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b><u>18</u></b>

## **Foreword**

by the College Equality Officers

We are very grateful to Ms Eager and Ms White for the time and effort they have put into researching and writing this report, which provides a quantitative and qualitative insight into the issue of gender equality, from the perspective of current undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Oxford. As College Equality Officers, we have edited the report, offered clarification and made certain factual corrections where necessary.

In 2015 New College decided to focus this research on the student body, and so this report does not examine the experiences of New College staff, nor look at statistical analysis relating to the gender break-down of staff. This decision was made for several reasons, including the fact that the college holds no data on non-academic staff beyond the last twelve years. It is apparent that many of our lowest paid staff are women, and that the majority of departmental heads are men, but when the college is considered in the context of the national job market, these trends are not unusual. Whilst the college does not collect extensive data on the background and educational attainment of its non-academic staff, it does collect and analyse data related to the employment of academic staff. This information is reported on annually within the college, and also published on the college's website. A quick summary of the figures shows that of the 1641 applications for academic posts made between 2010 and 2015, 43% were from female candidates, although only 33% of appointments were offered to women. Women are not significantly less likely to be shortlisted or appointed. It is true that the majority of the college's governing body members are male, but it is not possible for the college to specifically target female academics for employment; New College is committed to employing the very best academic staff, regardless of gender or other personal characteristics.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that many of the problems and issues raised in this report are not unique to New College; indeed, much of what follows is applicable to the University of Oxford as an entire institution. Where possible, the authors have tried to suggest action points which New College might pursue in order to address the issue of gender equality on a realistic scale. However, as a college there are some areas where New College cannot act autonomously. For example, the college cannot make radical changes to the undergraduate admissions process independently of the rest of the university, as it is restricted by the Common Framework for Admissions.

It is also prudent to note that, where statistical analysis has been included, the data sets from New College and the University are of very different sizes; in the last admissions cycle 3,751 undergraduate students were admitted to the University, of

which only 127 were made offers by New College. Therefore, the patterns of change amongst New College students look far more dramatic when plotted visually.

In addition, although we acknowledge that a response rate for the student survey of just over 7% (see page 7) is scientifically unreliable, we believe that it is important to publish these findings. While the responses of 50 students cannot be taken to represent the experience of our 700 students, we are concerned that any students should have experienced some of the things that they have done. We have therefore taken the decision to publish these survey results as part of our commitment to improving gender equality in the college, but in so doing we do not wish to imply that these experiences are in any way part of the typical experience of students at the college.

Despite these caveats, it is hoped that this report will provoke useful discussion and provide practical suggestions for improving the experience of female students at New College. However, we would also like to take this opportunity to draw attention to some of actions which the college has already taken to address the issue of gender inequality. For example, in Hilary Term 2016 the college sent out its first termly Equality and Diversity newsletter to all students and staff. This newsletter will be sent out every term, and includes information on events, resources, and relevant news. The college has also increased staffing in this area; the Admissions Officer now acts as an additional Equality Officer and Disability Co-Ordinator. As part of freshers' week, the Cox and Salvesen Fellows now also run sexual consent and race equality workshops for all new students, the first of which took place in 2015. Additionally, the college has strongly encouraged key college officers to attend an unconscious bias training course. Finally, Equality and Diversity has been added as a standing item to all college committee meeting agendas to encourage reflection and discussion around this important topic.

## **Key Recommendations for New College as identified by the student authors**

### **Admissions**

- Continue to develop the college's ongoing outreach work to include events focused on female applicants
- Continue to encourage and implement training for interviewers and interview shepherds
- Collect more extensive data on certain elements of the admissions process

### **Academic and Social Experience**

- Develop the study skills guidance issued to all students
- Develop alumni events including prominent female Old Members
- Improve collaboration and communication between the three Common Rooms, allowing increased, focussed discussion of the issue of gender equality
- Improve visibility of New College's harassment policies and welfare provisions

### **Exam Performance**

- Increase the provision of tailored exam preparation sessions and exam-specific welfare provision

These suggested action points are explained at length in the main body of the report.

## **Introduction**

Under the Equality Act of 2010, New College set itself the objective of monitoring and analysing gender inequality in the College, especially in undergraduate degree results. The intention was that an analysis of these results would give the College grounds for setting further strategic goals to ensure fair treatment of all students in its practices by addressing any discrepancies that arose from this analysis.

This report therefore aimed to address two perceived discrepancies. Firstly, analysis shows that female undergraduates at Oxford consistently achieve proportionally fewer first class degrees than their male counterparts across the majority of subjects. Secondly, female students are perceived to be less assertive and less confident than their male peers, and students believe that this impacts negatively upon their academic performance. The initial aim of the research therefore focused on potential sources of this difference in attitude between men and women in order to propose means of reducing the gender gap in Finals performance at Oxford.

The survey research and student consultations with members of the University (including New College students, OUSU representatives, and the Heads of the University Careers and Counselling Services) confirmed that some women do experience their time at Oxford differently to their male peers. No single problem or solution emerged from the research, but rather a series of areas where improvements could be made, though we acknowledge that each student experiences Oxford differently, and that many female students have not experienced discrimination as a result of their gender.

It is likely that individuals are affected by their gender long before they come to the University. For example, female students may already have been disadvantaged by gendered teaching or societal expectations when they arrive at Oxford. Many of these problems are experienced by female students university-wide, and are by no means specific to New College; however, the college is seeking to address this issue. Indeed, New College already has in place many of the tools required to do this. The college is well-placed to improve the experience of its female undergraduates, with the hope that this will also entail better performance in Finals exams.

Recommendations for action are listed at the beginning of the report and are expanded on throughout. The remainder of the report is structured to reflect three stages of the Oxford experience: Admissions; Social and Academic Experience; and Exam Performance. For each stage, findings are presented from the relevant data analysis and qualitative research, together with an outline of the factors that are believed to impact negatively on female students. Actions to combat these factors are then proposed. Before considering these, we present a selection of quotes from the college's survey of the student body (Hilary Term 2016) that help capture how gender inequality is experienced among the New College student body.

## Student perspective

In January 2016, a survey was circulated amongst the New College student body asking about student experiences of gender inequality or discrimination. Of the 700 students at New College, 50 chose to take respond to the survey. Some of the responses given are below:

*“The disparity between male and female first-class results in Finals exams is not proof that girls are worse or work less hard than boys, it is proof that Oxford as a university is, year after year, failing to teach its female students to produce the only type of work its tutors are willing to reward with a first.”*

*“I could have been learning in a supportive way and made progress faster. I was actively discouraged and I feel that I had to fight harder to do well.” “[The majority of tutors] teach and treat their students, of all genders, as if they were boys (and as if they come from a very specific educational background), and that is also the type of output that they want from them too- girls are constantly told to be more opinionated, be louder, be more confident, to worry less, etc. They have yet to learn that the primarily male way of studying and writing essays is not 'simply the better way'.”*

*“Professors have assumed I know less than males in science subjects.”*

*“Those I have been taught by have, over the several years of female students I have been in contact with, repeatedly treated these female students differently, as if they were slower, weaker, less interesting and less intelligent. All of them are experts on their subject, and all are perfectly lovely people. The issue is that whilst they know how to teach their male students to get Firsts, 90 percent of which in my experience come from a very particular educational background, they're just really not very good at teaching women.”*

*“On paper, I'm fine. I got my 2.1...”*

*“As a woman, I have experienced discrimination from tutors and students. When I first arrived as an undergraduate, I had to fight hard for certain tutors to treat me in the same way as my male counterparts. They automatically assumed I wasn't as clever. I have had male students patronise me and insult me because of my gender. I have seen male students ask younger women who they deem attractive to their dining society drinks parties.”*

*“One thing I do miss as a girl is strong female role models.”*

*“College needs to acknowledge that this is a serious issue, and needs to launch discussions about the topic with its students (in both only-female and mixed gender group sessions), after which it needs to have a completely 100 per cent serious talk with its tutors. As Oxford is essentially run by tutors, it is changing their habits which will be most important and which will be most conducive to change.”*

## Admissions

Two main areas of inequality in the admissions process were identified by the authors. First, fewer women are applying to New College, especially in the sciences. Second, fewer women are accepted to New College on average. One leads on from the other, so the second is unsurprising. Both of these are also problems at the University level, though New College appears to be performing below the University average on several dimensions. However, more data is required to assess whether this is statistically significant. Qualitative research also revealed additional problems with the interview process, listed below.

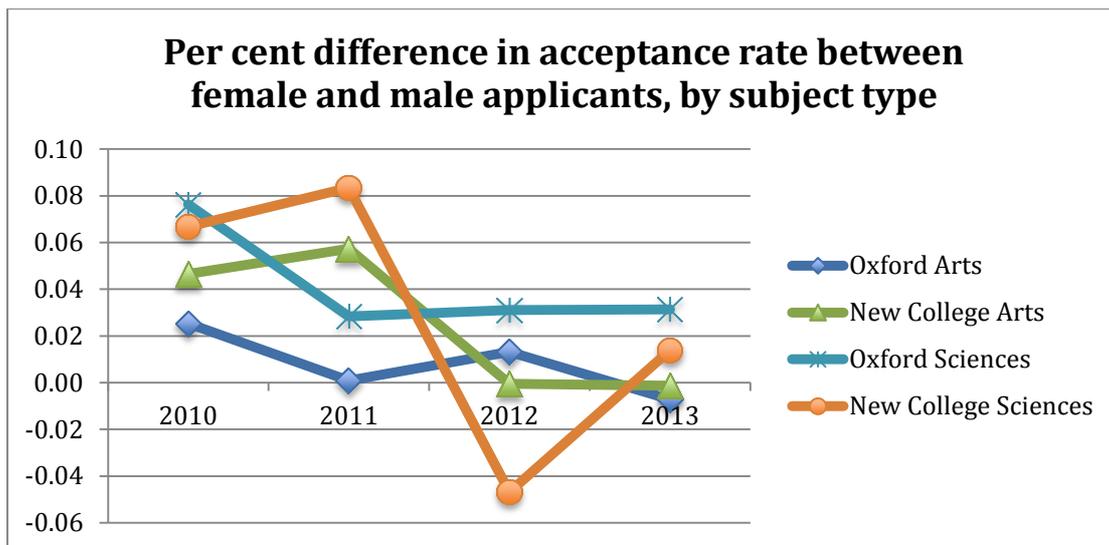
Concern: Fewer female students apply to Oxford than male students. The proportion of female applicants is particularly low in the sciences, where, in the 2014 admissions cycle 43% of applicants were women, compared to 49% overall (2011 to 2013). This is also a problem at New College: 43% of applicants to Science subjects were women during the 2014 admissions cycle (on par with the University).

New College applicant data also reveals that the proportion of female applicants has been falling since 2010, with 47% of applicants in 2014 identifying as women. There are some notable exceptions to this, including Biochemistry and Biological Sciences, where there are consistently more female than male applicants and therefore unsurprisingly more female candidates receive offers than they do in other science subjects. However, more could be done to encourage female students to apply, especially in the sciences.

*NB: We strongly commend the Admissions Office's current efforts to ensure that female students form a core and visible part of the access team and that a concerted effort is made to actively engage with girls during visits to college or outreach programmes to schools.*

Suggested Action: Consider organising events (such as an open day) that celebrate women in STEM subjects at New College to encourage female applicants to these subjects. The concentration of female students in certain subjects also appears to explain the gap in Finals achievement, so efforts to reduce this imbalance may have the additional benefit of reducing the Finals gap.

Concern: The University prides itself on its use of interviews in the application process; however, the authors are concerned that interviews may disadvantage female applicants. This problem is twofold: female applicants may feel themselves to be less well-prepared than their male peers; and interviewers may be exhibiting unconscious biases in the way they conduct and assess interviews with female candidates.



*Subtracting success rate for female candidates from rate for male candidates; negative numbers represent years in which acceptance rates were higher for female candidates than for male candidates.*

Concern: Across the University, fewer female candidates are admitted as a proportion of applicants compared to male candidates. For the period 2010 to 2014, New College admitted proportionately fewer female applicants than male applicants every year except for 2012. It should be noted that New College performs above the University average in acceptance rates for female candidates in science subjects. However, the opposite is true of arts subjects each year except 2012.

Suggested Action: We strongly support the University's policy of having two interviewers present during admissions interviews, and suggest that ideally one of these should be a woman. In subjects where two interviewers are not available, the Admissions Office has offered to recruit a graduate student to act as an observer or note-taker. It is hoped that having both male and female interviewers / observers can mitigate unconscious bias and also ensure that female applicants are provided with an example of an academic working in their subject across the University.

Suggested Action: New College already strongly encourages tutors to complete initial and regular refresher interview training. It is recommended that extra training be held in-college, ideally with the involvement of experienced New College interviewers, with a focus on equipping interviewers to conduct interviews in a way that is fair to candidates of all genders and backgrounds.

Suggested Action: New College already trains interview shepherds to be sensitive to particular issues female candidates may face. For example, a shepherd at last year's interviews observed that male candidates were often more confident in discussing how their interviews had gone, and that female candidates tended to be much quieter and less confident. Additional training, on encouraging shepherds to intervene if candidates appear to be intimidating or discouraging other applicants, is also included.

Concern: The authors are concerned that the use of aptitude tests may disadvantage female applicants. This is supported by research conducted both at the University and elsewhere which argues that aptitude tests may reduce the likelihood of female candidates receiving an offer after interview (Jake Anders, Institute of Education University of London, 2014). This is University policy and so the college is constrained by this in its admissions. However, the college could lead discussions over the potential unequal effects of aptitude tests.

Suggested Action: New College should support tutors to engage in discussion of the use of aptitude tests within their departments. However, whilst departments use aptitude tests to varying degrees during the admissions process, it should be acknowledged that every department uses them in conjunction with other elements of the application (including contextual data), and that no department will make the decision to reject someone on the basis of an aptitude test alone.

Suggested Action: The college should collect data on the effect of aptitude tests in order to inform future analysis. This might include retaining the scores students are assigned for each part of their application to better estimate the effect of aptitude tests on determining which candidates receive offers.

Suggested Action: As part of its ongoing outreach work, the college might provide further support to schools preparing for aptitude tests, so that both male and female applicants feel supported throughout the admissions process.

## Academic and Social Experience

This is arguably the stage at which New College is most likely to be able to improve the experience of female undergraduates within College. It is also at this stage that the problems female students encounter become more difficult to define, being much more widespread as well as more variable depending on the student's working and living environment, whatever their college membership. Discussions within the New College student body suggest there is a real impetus for change at this level; in January 2016, female students formed a New College Women's Group of over 100 members, with the aim of establishing a supportive community for like-minded women and to provide a forum for discussion of women's issues. Moreover, various members of the college's governing body are already aware of the issue, and have indicated a willingness to be part of an effort to improve it. This section is divided into four Academic and two Social concerns and their respective actions, but overall the focus should be on raising awareness of gender inequality amongst both tutors and students and collecting information on factors that could affect academic performance and general wellbeing.

### Academic experience

Concern: Women may perceive themselves to be less well prepared for the style of academic work Oxford requires. Female students are perceived to write less assertively than male students, which is said to disadvantage them. Whether or not this is true at first, female students report that they are frequently told to write more 'like male students'. Given the decentralised nature of the tutorial system, it is possible that a female student whose writing style does not conform to the University's expectations will not be given guidance on how to rectify this. This problem clearly extends beyond New College, but the college could help rectify this problem among students here. In fact, the college already has the tools in place to do so.

Suggested Action: The college already runs a study skills workshop for first year undergraduates as part of freshers' week. In the past, this workshop has focused on issues such as plagiarism. Such a workshop would be an excellent opportunity to further provide students with practical advice on how best to approach their academic work and structure their writing. While many tutors already speak to students about this, a workshop would formalise this process and guarantee that every student received this training. This would also have an effect for students in later exam performance, as well as in their tutorial work.

Suggested Action: The college should consider developing a study skills handbook that details practical advice for reading and writing effectively, and information for finding additional resources. Some colleges already provide a study skills handbook to incoming students. This could be sent out to students with their welcome pack prior to coming to New College, which would ensure that male and female students are well-prepared from the very beginning.

Suggested Action: The college might also consider encouraging tutors to run subject-specific study skills sessions later in the first year to follow up on the advice given in the handbook and initial workshop and provide specific advice on how best to approach Prelims and Mods.

It is hoped that providing these additional resources will help students of all genders to feel well prepared for study and examinations at the University, regardless of the study skills teaching provided by their schools.

Concern: Students believe that there may be a problem across the University with the way in which female students are taught. The problem is twofold: first, anecdotal evidence suggests female students tend to participate less in tutorials, which means they receive less direct feedback than their male peers. Second, tutors may be teaching male and female students in the same way, when in fact they might respond better to different styles of learning. This was highlighted in the student survey.

*NB: There is currently no specific aspect of the Teaching Fellowship Preparation Programme for Oxford tutors in the Institute of Education Programme that discusses different approaches to learning by gender.*

Suggested Action: The college might consider making it a requirement for all early career research staff to enrol on the Oxford Institute of Education's Teaching Fellowship Preparation Programme. (At present, it is suggested, but not required.)

Suggested Action: While this problem extends across the University, New College could lead efforts to evaluate and rectify inequalities in teaching style. More research is needed on this issue and the College should support tutors in this. For example, the College might encourage tutors to take note of participation in class and ensure that female students are responding as often as their male peers. More discussion could be had of the particular needs of female students. For example, the authors felt that female students may need more encouragement and may take strong criticism more personally than male students.

Concern: The survey revealed that there is a potential lack of prominent female role models or mentors, both academic and otherwise, in the College. The lack of female role models is a problem across the University, though the recent appointment of Louise Richardson as the University Vice Chancellor, and events like Hertford and Wadham Colleges' celebration of 40 years of co-education, go some way to rectify this. The New College Development Office already does an excellent job of ensuring there is a good balance of alumni from different backgrounds at its annual Careers' Day, and that undergraduates have the chance to talk to successful professional women. However, New College could further highlight prominent female alumni and academics and support female mentorship programmes.

Suggested Action: Invite more prominent female alumni to speak to students, with the intention of providing inspiring examples for current undergraduates. The Development Office has suggested Kate Mosse, Sara Weller and Sally Phillips as potential speakers.

Suggested Action: For the academic year 2015/16, OUSU piloted a mentoring scheme for graduate applications, pairing female graduate students with female undergraduates who are considering applying for Masters or DPhil programmes. One respondent to the survey highlighted this programme and emphasised that it had been extremely beneficial for her to be paired with a graduate mentor (who was incidentally also at New College) and cited the programme as one of the main reasons why she felt able to apply for a Masters programme. The JCR and MCR should consider running a similar programme internally to encourage undergraduates who are considering pursuing further study.

Concern: Across the University, students report that women are sometimes discouraged by tutors from studying certain areas, like feminist theory or issues of marginalised people, because they are not perceived to be as scholarly, not valued highly, or not considered as part of the canon in many disciplines.

Suggested Action: While this is not an issue that is specific to New College, the college can still be a force for change in this area by encouraging tutors to give due consideration to marginalised authors and issues of marginalised people and to participate in department efforts to produce balanced reading lists for their students.

## Social experience

Concern: While different people in College are concerned by the issue of gender inequality, there is a discerned lack of coordination between offices to try and tackle the matter with a cohesive effort. The existing Equality & Diversity Committee meets yearly and is chaired by the Warden, and the college also has two equality officers who monitor relevant issues between meetings of the Committee. Additionally, Equality and Diversity is included as a standing agenda item on all college committee agendas, and each committee includes members from all three Common Rooms, although there is no specific forum for the discussion of gender inequality.

The concern was raised in the student survey that College is currently 'only paying lip service' to the issue of gender equality, when it could in fact be setting the example for other colleges on how to approach this matter.

Suggested Action: The college should lead the way in creating a platform for discussion that brings together motivated tutors and students. There is already momentum on this issue in each of the Common Rooms: members of the JCR have started a highly popular Women's Group, while MCR members are campaigning for portraits of female alumni to be hung in the MCR and SCR in order to increase the visibility of prominent female ex-members, and in Trinity Term 2016 the college will host its first in-house Springboard programme for female students. A forum for discussion would nonetheless allow for better coordination between Common Rooms and College Offices, would ensure greater transparency across the college, and would encourage innovation and implementation of policy. This might be more easily accomplished if the SCR and JCR were to appoint their own Women's Officers. Women's Officers could lead action in this area and liaise between Common Rooms, while acting as a point of call for members within their Common Room.

Concern: Across the UK, women are disproportionately subjected to harassment and violence when they are at university; a 2010 report by the NUS found that two-thirds of women experience harassment at university. New College's harassment policy is available on the College's website and in the Dean's Handbook, which all students are required to read. However, some students are unaware of the policy and concerned that allegations of harassment would not be taken seriously by the College.

Suggested Action: We suggest that the policy be made more visible to students. This might include making it evident on the new website and informing students who they should speak to about harassment. Emphasis should be on the seriousness with which allegations are handled and the neutrality of the relevant officers.

Suggested Action: Given student concerns that allegations might not be taken seriously, we also suggest that students have the option to speak to a female

officer about harassment. The Chaplain and Home Bursar are female members of the Welfare Team and are already available to students; An SCR Women's Officer may be an additional point of contact in this area.

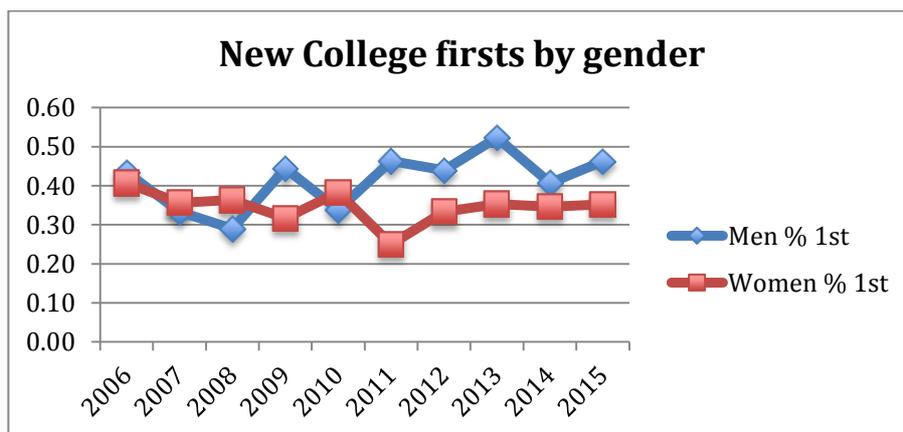
Finally, the student body suspected that women were more likely to suffer from anxiety or other mental health issues than men. Alan Percy, head of the Counselling Service, confirmed that the Service is consistently used more by women (roughly two thirds of students who use the service are female), but that we cannot conclude from this that women are more likely to suffer from mental health issues. Instead, it is likely that women are more willing to talk about these issues than men, but that male students are equally affected. New College should therefore continue to strongly encourage all students to use the resources at their disposal, especially the Counselling Service.

## Exam performance

Our hope is that implementation of the actions recommended above will already go some way to increasing a female undergraduate's chances of achieving a First, or at least improve the quality of her experiences of New College and her general well-being while studying here.

Given that many of these suggested action points require further consideration and cannot be implemented immediately, we have identified short-term actions the College can take to hopefully reduce the gender gap in Finals performance. We also highlight other potential sources of inequality and possible long-term solutions.

Concern: Across the University, female students underperform in Finals exams relative to their male peers: averaged over ten years, a higher proportion of men obtained first class degrees (41.40% vs 34.60%). Correspondingly, women are more likely than men to get 2.i degrees (60.68% vs 51.95%). This appears to be explained by the fact that men and women are concentrated in different subjects.



It should be noted that this gap in results does vary by division. In particular, New College's female students in Medical Sciences have tended to outperform male students in terms of the percentage who receive Firsts. However, in the three other divisions (Humanities, Social Sciences, and MPLS) a smaller percentage of women receive Firsts at New College. The gap in Firsts at Finals has been particularly alarming in the MPLS subjects, where 68% of male students received Firsts compared to 29% of female students in 2015, down from 74% compared to 25% in 2013. We consider below three specific problems behind these figures, with suggested actions for each.

Concern: The college survey suggested that female students feel they are not as well prepared for Finals examinations as their male peers. In particular, they may be less confident in the revision process and feel the need to learn much more material in order to be sure of being able to answer enough questions in the exam. While New College has run in-college exam preparation workshops for students of all years for a number of years, these have historically been poorly attended. However the workshops would be an excellent means of ensuring that all students are prepared for revision and exam essay-writing.

Suggested Action: The authors suggest tailoring the college's exam preparation workshops to specific subjects or by discipline. A first step might be to re-brand the workshops to attract more attention. This proposal is inspired by feedback from both male and female students who received Firsts in 2015 after having attended a general preparation session run by the History Faculty, entitled "Interpreting exam criteria: how to get marks over 75" with Dr Conrad Leyser. The students reported that they had found this session instructive and very worthwhile. Second, the college ought to consider running subject-specific workshops, or encouraging tutors to do so. Students might be more likely to attend if they feel the information will be more relevant to their subjects.

*NB: With the introduction of the first year academic skills workshop, the need for an exam preparation workshop would hopefully be less pressing, as female students would be better prepared for examinations after their first and second year assessments.*

Concern: New College already provides access to a range of welfare services for its students. In particular, students expressed their sincere gratitude for the excellent support of the Cox and Salvesen fellows during this stressful period. However, students reported that it is not always clear who they ought to speak to about any mental health problems. The college survey also revealed that students are keenly aware of New College's excellent academic record, and the value the college places on performing very well in exams. While this is a source of pride for students, it can also be felt as a source of pressure during Finals.

Suggested Action: The College might consider offering additional welfare training on, for example, mindfulness, as well as encouraging students to use the resources on the Counselling Service website or mobile apps like Headspace. The Head of the Counselling Service highlighted the importance of knowing how to keep yourself well during the exam period. Extra workshops or training either internally or with the University might also mean that fewer students would need the support of College Welfare Officers.

## **Conclusion**

When considering the problem of gender inequality in Oxford it becomes apparent that New College cannot correct all of the issues faced by our female students. However, we hope this report has shown that, by the accumulative effect of a number of small actions implemented across different areas of New College life – some of which are already in place – improvement can be effected while still acknowledging the scale of the overall problem. There is already significant momentum amongst the student body to take action on this. New College could support students and staff to address the gender gap in Finals performance and ensure that the time students spend here is as fulfilling as possible. Leading the way on this matter at a University level will be a source of positive attention and a point of pride for New College staff and students alike, empowering current and future female students to achieve their full potential. We hope that New College will recognise both the need to collect more comprehensive information on this matter, and the engage with the opportunity to instigate real change on an issue that is currently garnering a great deal of attention.