

Colleges, parcels and parking (CoHSAT project 2019-20) -summary of findings

The original intention was to assess how many parking places are within the University of Oxford college premises. The colleges are autonomous and not party to the University's policy of reducing and eliminating parking. The number of peak parking permits issued by the University has been gradually reducing and from October 2019 to September 2022 it will have reduced commuter parking by 80 spaces (Adam Bows, personal communication). As private premises, the college parking is not covered by any City Council's plans to reduce public parking.

After advice from Bart Ashton, Domestic Bursar, Lady Margaret Hall, a survey of the 39 colleges was carried out, with 15 responses (Table 1). Ed Wigzell, University Estate's department provided comparable information for the University departments.

Category	Average number for 15 responding colleges	Pro rata extrapolation for all 39 colleges	University departments (in City centre)
Parking spaces	32	1266	420
Academic and support staff	156	6084	9700
Ratio of parking places to staff	1:5	1:5	1:23

Table 1: Parking in University of Oxford colleges and departments, 2019. Note: Some staff have a presence in both a college and a department

Over 80% of the college parking is provided on the main site, with the remainder at subsidiary locations, within the City centre. In total, the colleges have over three times as many parking spaces as the University's departments and staff competition for these parking spaces is much less intense at colleges. The colleges employ approximately two support staff for every academic. Many support staff have relatively low wages and cannot afford to live in the centre of Oxford and have to be beyond the ring road or in a village. Some support staff work either early or late, when good public transport may not be available, for instance they have to be in by 6am to provide breakfasts. Officially, there is no student parking at most colleges.

At the time of the survey, it was the opinion of Bart Ashton that: *"I can think of almost no reasons colleges would give those [parking places] up."*

Subsequently, the publication of *Connecting Oxford* has introduced the suggestion of a workplace parking levy (WPL)¹ for the eastern area of the city. This would affect very few colleges. There is uncertainty about whether this will be applied and, if so, for what geographical area. Some responses (from CoHSAT and from the University of Oxford) stated that the WPL should apply to the whole of the city and thus all colleges. The annual charge is likely to be in the range of £400 - £600. Employers are responsible for paying the charge, and may choose to pass some or all of it on to employees who park at work. If a charge of about £500 is imposed, this would amount to a cost to the colleges of nearly £0.62m, or £16,000 per average college.

The substantial disparity between parking provision at the colleges and at the departments is now clearly understood. This is coupled with the University discussing a policy to eradicate parking, perhaps by 2029. However the colleges respond, it seems likely that pressure from the WPL and other transport changes in Oxford will keep the issue of parking high on the college agenda, as it should be.

¹ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/connectingoxfordshire.pdf>, slide 14

Parcel deliveries

During the discussions with the ever-helpful Bart Ashton, the issue of parcel deliveries emerged as a concern for colleges. This, together with a generally defensive approach to parking provision, resulted in most of the research being focused on parcel deliveries, rather than parking. In addition, there appeared to be virtually no evidence of the scale of this emerging problem.

As a result, the parking survey also included questions on parcel deliveries. Fifteen colleges provided information and collectively received 1,170 parcels a day (78 per respondent college). Pro rata that would be just over 3,000 a day for all 39 colleges and represented an increase over the previous year variously estimated to be 10-50%. Some colleges are having considerable difficulty coping with the influx of parcels at their (small) porter's lodges.

During the year, CoHSAT participated in meetings with the City Council, University Estate's Department, colleges and others. It emerged that:

- a. The growth in parcel deliveries is on the agenda for several organisations, particularly with the discussion of traffic filters in [Connecting Oxford](#), which would limit the access available to diesel vans;
- b. That a number of solutions were beginning to be considered, including quotas and price rises at the college and trans-shipment into cargo bikes (e.g. [Pedal and Post](#)) generally across the city;
- c. Parcels vary in size, but it is thought that about half are small (two shoeboxes or smaller) and the other half are larger.
- d. No-one knew of the attitudes of the students – Adam Bows was particularly concerned about this.

With the help of Mark Blandford-Baker, Home Bursar, Magdalene College, CoHSAT undertook a second survey in November 2019, aimed at garnering student opinions and perspectives on some future options. The survey was widely circulated by college bursars, which resulted in 1,226 responses, a few of these were completed by staff, but the majority by students. The analysis of these is covered in a PowerPoint presentation [here](#) and review of individual comments [here](#). Some of the headline results are:

- a. Parcel deliveries to college are seen as a right, as this is the student's home;
- b. Any extra price imposed on a student for a parcel would be seen as socially unjust, as it would be more punitive for poorer students;
- c. Any quota on the number of parcels received by an individual student would be logistically impossible for the porters: they would not know which parcels to accept or receive from a delivery;
- d. The number of parcels is expected to continue to rise, with no-one being able to predict either the growth per year, nor for how many years;
- e. Many of the purchases are second-hand books or clothes, so are more sustainable than buying new in Oxford;
- f. A sizeable proportion of students found the retail environment in Oxford inhospitable. Shops selling more sustainable products would be welcomed;
- g. 15% of students receive 11 or more parcels a term, representing 41% of all parcels. Overseas students may be a group buying more, as they can bring in so little on a flight;
- h. Only a third of respondents find next-day delivery important;
- i. Disabled students and those on medication have special needs;
- j. Some on-line suppliers (e.g. Amazon) will split an order, to suit their logistics;
- k. A large amount of unnecessary waste packaging is created. It is not known which online suppliers are the main culprits and there is a poor fit with college recycling options.
- l. The courier companies appear to group parcel deliveries per college fairly effectively. Royal Mail may be the only courier to regularly go to colleges twice a day.

There seem to be few ways in which to curb student online shopping, though some awareness raising might have a limited effect. The best way to reduce pollution (whether CO₂ or NO_x emissions) would be to ensure that the delivery system is clean and non-polluting:

1. Transfer small parcels from the couriers to cargo bikes for delivery within Oxford. Yodel already pay Pedal & Post to take their parcels for the last mile, and this is financially beneficial for both companies.
2. Larger parcels should probably be trans-shipped into an electric van and delivered to the colleges late in the day, after the evening rush-hour. Most colleges have porters on duty 24/7, so they could take delivery during the night, if necessary.
3. There may have to be special arrangements for fragile parcels, to ensure that responsibility for breakages can be identified. This means a limited number of handlers.
4. There may be security issues (who can sign for receipt of the parcel) to be clarified.



At a meeting on 5th February 2020, the City Council, supported by the University, colleges and County Council, took responsibility for progressing with policy. An early task will be to secure funding for a member of staff (not full time) to focus on the issues around parcel deliveries, develop expertise and get agreement on next steps. This is likely to be wider than just the colleges; the University is also assessing its own consolidation scheme. Another early task would be to get the 10 or so courier companies round the table, together with Pedal & Post, to see what collaboration will be possible. At least one company (DPD) has already purchased an electric van. There is some urgency with *Connecting Oxford* being implemented in 2022, which should help to focus the discussions.

The parcels study has clarified the size of the problem in colleges and advanced knowledge on the potential for solutions. The present situation is creating congestion around colleges, together with irritating parking in cycle lanes and on yellow lines by the courier companies.

About CoHSAT

The Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel (CoHSAT) is a group of voluntary and campaigning organisations working across Oxfordshire to create attractive, accessible and people-friendly streets. We will do this by encouraging efficient, active, low carbon and sustainable travel, which will reduce traffic, air pollution and noise, and enable healthy and thriving communities. More details can be seen at <http://www.cohsat.org.uk>.

For further information on these five investigations and other CoHSAT activities see <http://www.cohsat.org.uk> or email us at CoHSATOxon@gmail.com.

