**Somerville College Website Development Brief**

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| **Background**  Somerville College was founded in 1879 as one of Oxford University’s first women’s colleges. It was founded on a vision of radicalism and inclusivity, with the explicit intention of extending the right to a university education not merely to women but also non-conformists (e.g. those who didn’t follow Anglicanism). This ethos of radicalism/inclusivity is often referenced in the description of Somerville as being ‘founded to include the excluded.’ Since then, it has been a bastion of learning and scholarship, a hub for progressive rights and research centres (such as the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development and the Margaret Thatcher Scholarship Trust) and a vibrant, caring home-from-home for its 450-odd students. Other key messages/straplines that resonate with the College are ‘Freeing thinking since 1879’ (though I don’t like the idea of trading on our history so much) and ‘If you want to change the world, come to Somerville.’  Notable alumni of Somerville include the writers AS Byatt, Iris Murdoch, Dorothy Sayer, Nina Bawden and Susan Cooper, business leaders Margaret Casely-Hayford (Chair of The Globe) and Baroness Vadera (Chair of Santander), historians Gill Bennett (Chief Historian for the FCO and Kate Williams, the academics Emma Smith (Oxford’s Professor of Shakespeare Studies) and the literary critic Enid Starkie, the politicians Onora O’Neill, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Dame Shirley Williams, the television personalities Dame Esther Rantzen, Xand van Tulleken and Susie Dent and the scientists Dorothy Hodgkin (chemist & Britain’s first and only female Nobel laureate in science), pioneering research medic Dame Janet Vaughan and Susan M Scott, the first woman to win the Australian Prime Minister’s Medal for Science. The current Principal of the College is Jan Royall, the Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, former Leader of the House of Lords, an incredibly passionate, hard-working, kind and committed educationalist with a long history of supporting progressive causes.  The college first admitted men in 1984 and is now more or less equally mixed (I think). As regards its recent history, the College is in a very strong position thanks to excellent financial management, excellent fundraising by the Development Team and a highly engaged and supportive alumni community, which is slightly weighted towards its older alumni. Where the college wants to change is in increasing its Access statistics – which is to say, it is currently seeking to live up to its foundational ethos of including the excluded by attracting a diverse body of students irrespective of economic, social or racial difference. |
| **Project Background**  The current Somerville website was launched over 5 years ago, and even then was not universally loved. It now has some parts suffering from defective functionality, some areas that are obsolete/unvisited and an information architecture so unnavigable that it has lost the confidence and trust of most members of the community, who do not view it as a viable communication hub.  In 2019, a Somerville access website was launched for prospective applicants using Drupal. The intention was for this apply.some site to be incorporated into the new website once it was ready.  Development for the new Somerville College website (the main one) was initiated by my predecessor in 2019. A small research group was consulted, and an initial budge of £6k was agreed to develop the website. These consultations resulted in a design which I presented to Standing Committee in September 2020, where it was felt that they did not capture the essence of the College or meet the strong business need for a dynamic, engaging hub that will win the trust and support of the Somerville community. This feedback gave me the opportunity to consider an alternative provider and a clear mandate to try and create a website that will not merely serve as a functional replacement for the existing one, but a powerful and compelling articulation of what makes Somerville special.  Finally, I decided to try and anticipate the need for cohesion across all Somerville’s communication activities (online, print, ambient, editorial) by asking my colleagues if we could brief a design agency called Visual Philosophy to try and roll the work they were already doing for a new transformative fundraising campaign called RISE into a general brand refresh for the College. RISE stands for Resilience, Inclusivity, Sustainability and Excellence, and speaks to four key pillars for the College over the next five years, catering for the need to maintain academic excellence while developing the strength of college and individuals and extending the promise of a brilliant education to those who need it most. The results of this brand refresh are really promising – they have not been formally approved, but have received informal support and I have spoken to Gemma Presky about the possibility of using these designs as a really useful starting point / compass bearing for the design of the Somerville website. |
| **The Objective**  The website should act as the centrepiece of Somerville College’s communications strategy, driving attraction and engagement among prospective students, current students, Fellows and alumni. It should provide a dynamic hub into which all our other digital engagement platforms will feed (at present these are YouTube, CrowdCast (online events), Twitter, FB and LinkedIn, plus a really poor showing on Instagram). It should constitute a bold articulation of the values that make Somerville stand out (bold, life-affirming, etc.), which are not articulated by the current design. |
| **Who is our target audience and what do we want their preception to be?**  **Prospective students** – teens, hence proponents of visual narrative but also switched-on and engaged.  **Current students** – same, although their objectives in visiting will be less shop window and more transactional (calendars, events, maybe some news items, maybe match reports)  **Academics** – We want to attract new academics to come and work here. They must see Somerville as a place with a strong identify and sense of itself, a place to aspire towards, to belong, to identify with.  **Fellows** – we have an enormous challenge in making current Fellows trust the website and regard it as suitably exciting for them to want their work featured there. Interactive content such as video interviews with them, tours of their labs, etc., might help here. We also  **Alumni** – our alumni are loyal, passionate and quick to complain if we’re not behaving in the way they expect College to behave. They are great supporters and great friends, and we need to make them feel valued with events, engaging news stories and excellent stewardship. |
| **What do we want them their perception to be?**  Somerville is pioneering, exuberant, life-affirming and progressive.  Somerville is the home of free-thinking.  Somerville has an identity which sets it apart from the more staid Oxford colleges that will equip it for the future.  Prospective students should think: this is their new home, the home of free thinking.  Current students should think: this is their home, they’re proud of its traditions and vision.  Academics should think: this is a community that knows itself and is an aspirational place to belong.  Fellows should think: they are proud of their College and their place within it.  Alumni should think: they are proud of their College and their place within it. |
| **What is the one persuasive thing we can say about Somerville, e.g. the proposition?**  The home of free thinking |
| **Specific Dos and Don’ts**   1. **Do** be bold and colourful as per the attached Somerville Rebrand document (not yet formally approved, but with informal support) 2. **Do** remember the straplines and general ethos of radical inclusivity. 3. **Do** remember the analogy about Somervillians being like thistles, e.g. beautiful but prickly. So, in other words, remember that Somerville should never be portrayed as wishy-washy, whimsical or cute. Rather, it’s bold and sharp and working hard to change the world for the better. 4. **Don’t** use too much white space (see previous designs here: <https://xd.adobe.com/view/9237c8e8-6323-45e1-b081-92d857f1cfef-c764/screen/c47bcb6d-b148-40fe-a5fb-b84198fcb6c2>) 5. **Don’t** use soft pastel shades or anything that might perpetuate the negative stereotypes associated with having been a women’s college (again, this was perceived as a flaw in the previous designs) |
| **What deliverables do we want**   * A beautiful website with rock solid UX for all our key audiences (see below on Discovery/Expedition phase) * Dynamic home page featuring events + news, social widgets, etc. * API for calendars, esp. for current students * Advice on creating a password protected mini ‘intranet’ (we don’t officially have one) * Excellent Events and News functionality * Excellent UX for our key audiences * A navigation that gives prominence to primary navigational areas (Study Here, Live Here, About Us) as well as secondary ones, which cater for some of our key internal stakeholders such as the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development, the Scholarship and Funding pages (key driver for attracting new students) and the Margaret Thatcher Scholarship Trust. * Discovery/Exploration phase: We have serious challenges with information architecture / findability. To mitigate these issues, we’d like you to propose some lightweight research activities to explore and ultimately improve findability, e.g. card sorts and perhaps usability testing based on user type using a basic prototype of the information architecture (Treejack via optimalworkshop) |
| **Wish List**  For homepage:   1. This website is not great, but I really like the side-by-side presentation of Events / News: <https://www.mansfield.ox.ac.uk> 2. I’ve always loved what you did for <https://hamptonschool.org.uk> as I like the clear horizontal swatches of info – it’s easily navigable without succumbing to endless scroll or too much asymmetric left/right reading (which wouldn’t appeal to older alumni). I think we’d like that, along with lovely full-bleed imagery and rich colour. Also, I think we need functionality allowing that deeper dive into our key audience areas within the homepage, e.g. work here, life here, etc. 3. For clarity and strong use of colour, I really like the Said Business School website: <https://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk> – what I don’t like here is the uniform left/right alignment of content.   For a generally good website with excellent use of video, clear navigation despite reams of info: <https://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk>  For events: I love the mosaic-style layout TORCH use – the amount of copy is perfect and imagery works well. <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/whatson> |
| **What are our cost parameters?**  £25k would be good. Bear in mind we don’t need full development phase for design. |
| **Timeframe**  We’d love to start in the new year, hit the ground running, aiming for an 8-12 week design and build phase. While this is occurring, my Comms Officer and I will craft all the messaging and copy, and we’ll aim to have a release date for the start of Trinity term (14th April). |