Why I sent Oxford a rejection letter

A little over a month ago, I sent Oxford a rejection email that parodied the thousands that they send each year. Much to my surprise, it has become a bit of an Internet hit, and has provoked reactions of both horror and amusement.

In my letter I wrote: "I have now considered your establishment as a place to read Law (Jurisprudence). I very much regret to inform you that I will be withdrawing my application. I realize you may be disappointed by this decision, but you were in competition with many fantastic universities and following your interview, I am afraid you do not quite meet the standard of the universities I will be considering."

I sent the email after returning from my interview at Magdalen College, Oxford, to prove to a couple of my friends that Oxbridge did not need to be held in awe. One of them subsequently shared it on Facebook because he found it funny.

I certainly did not expect the email to spread as far as it has. Varying between offers of TV interviews and hundreds of enthusiastic Facebook messages, it has certainly been far-reaching. Many of my friends and undoubtedly many strangers were unable to comprehend that I'd sent such an email to this bastion of prestige and privilege. Why was I not afraid of damaging my future prospects as a lawyer? Didn't I think this might hurt my chances with other universities?

For me, such questions paint a picture of a very cynical society. I do not want to study law because I want to be rich, or wear an uncomfortable wig and cloak. Perhaps optimistically, I want to study law because I am interested in justice.

To me, withdrawing my application to an institution that is a symbol of unfairness in both our education and the legal system (which is so dominated by Oxbridge graduates) makes perfect sense, and I am reluctant to be part of a system so heavily dominated by such a narrow group of self-selecting elites.

So, why did I apply in the first place? If you're achieving high grades at A-level (or equivalent), you can feel quite a lot of pressure to "prove yourself" by getting an Oxbridge offer. Coupled with the fact that I grew up on benefits in council estates throughout Bristol — not a type of heritage often associated with an Oxbridge interview — I decided to give it a try.

It was only at the interview that I started to question what exactly I was trying to prove. I was well aware that fantastic candidates are often turned down, and I did not believe that this was a true reflection of their academic potential.

Although I share concern that not going to Oxbridge gives you a "chip on your shoulder", I did not write to Oxford to avoid the risk of being labeled as an "Oxbridge reject": I already am one. Last year I made an (admittedly weak) application to Cambridge and was inevitably rejected post-interview.

A year ago, I was in awe of the beautiful buildings of Oxbridge, but today I am in awe of the sheer number of people who, like me, have managed to not take it so seriously. Ultimately, I am not harming Oxford by laughing at it, and it is an amazing feeling to realize that so many people are enjoying my email. Actually, I was amazed to know how many people of different ages bothered to read it and even to leave their comments about it in Facebook. I had fun reading some of them, too.

The author accuses society of cynicism because ...

1) people seem to be more worried about reputations.
2) people supported Oxbridge.
3) lawyers do their job for high incomes.
4) universities are very selective.