CONFERENCE OF COMMON ROOMS

Oxford SU

Conference of Common Rooms

18:00-20:00, Thursday 15th May, HB Allen Centre, Keble College

Minutes

Present: Eleanor Miller (VP for Undergraduate Education & Access) (Chair), Lauren Schaefer (VP for Postgraduate Education & Access), Emilie Tapping (Co-CEO), Nikki Smith (Co-CEO)

In attendance:

Balliol JCR	Green Templeton	Mansfield MCR	St Hilda's MCR
Balliol MCR	GCR	Merton JCR	St Hugh's JCR
Brasenose JCR	Hertford JCR	Merton MCR	St Hugh's MCR
Christ Church JCR	Jesus JCR	New JCR	St John's JCR
Corpus Christi JCR	Jesus MCR	Oriel JCR	St Peter's MCR
Exeter JCR	Keble JCR	Somerville JCR	University JCR
Exeter MCR	Keble MCR	St Anne's JCR	University WCR
	Kellogg MCR	St Antony's GCR	Wadham SU
	Magdalen JCR	St Catz JCR	
	Magdalen MCR	St Catz MCR	

Apologies: No apologies were received.

1. Introduction

EM welcomed attendees to the first Conference of Common Rooms and thanked those who have contributed through submitting motions and suggesting Bye-Law amendments.

ET framed first meeting in the context of the SU Transformation and the primary purpose of the SU. ET outlined the purpose of Conference of Common Rooms as a democratic space to build collective voice between Officers and Common Rooms. This model will only work with participant engagement. There will be an evaluation survey following this meeting which will be measured alongside other KPIs such as attendance and extent to which students feel represented. The SU is managing resources to ensure the model is sustainable and impactful. The Conference of Common Room pilot will continue into next academic year if the Trinity pilots are successful. ET presented a timeline of the model and explained the function of Conference of Common Room agendas.

2. Governance Matters

EM raised the matter of MCR and JCR Deputy Co-Chair election.

- Adam Daniel, Keble JCR President was duly elected as JCR Deputy Co-Chair. The role was uncontested. All votes were in favour.

- Rea Tresa, Exeter MCR President, was duly elected as MCR Deputy Co-Chair. The role was uncontested. All votes were in favour.
- Both individuals will be in post until the end of Trinity Term, when both will come to the end of their presidency terms.

EM raised the matter of Part-Time Officer and Student Trustee elections.

EM raised the matter of Nominations Committee, tasked with recruiting an External Trustee for the Board, and requested volunteers to join the Committee

- Kush Vaidya, St Catz JCR President, was duly elected as member on Nominations Committee. The role was uncontested. There was one abstention.

Items for Discussion

3. International Student Fees

Motion chaired by EM

Proposed by: Lauren Schaefer (VP for Postgraduate Education & Access), Fahad Al-Huda (Kellogg MCR President), Eleanor Miller (VP for Undergraduate Education & Access)

Presented by: Julian Mathe, Sidharth Suresh & Alexandra Fusa

Presenters provided a contextual background to the motion. They called for the SU to represent undergraduate students' concerns on international student fee uplifts, push for fee predictability (fixed or capped increases to 4%), and more transparent communications. Presidents were asked to discuss the motion.

- Cambridge uses a fixed fee after entry model; Oxford doesn't.
- Fee increases are not aligned with home fees (which are capped by the government).
- Political factors and visa policies beyond University decisions impact overseas students.
- Wadham SU President supported fixed fee models. Noted benefits like advance payments reduce risks associated with changing currency exchange.
- An MCR President raised concerns that fixed fee models (like Cambridge's) may drive up total costs.
- Mansfield MCR President supported the motion but queried the assumption that Oxford's increases are linked to Cambridge's higher fees. They asked whether the SU could prevent fee-matching.
- EM, SU, and LS, SU, sit on the Joint Fees & Student Support Advisory Group (JFSSAG); the motion could mandate those conversations.
- LS, SU, noted that the motion calls for fee transparency and that plenty of notice to uplifts is essential for students to prepare finances, in addition to opposing increasing fees.
- St Catz JCR President cautioned against mandating a Cambridge model without examining its impact. He asked for SU to explore implications before endorsing.
- Request to split motion from Keble JCR President: one on university fee-setting, another on government immigration policy. EM, SU, noted that this is not possible under the current Bye-Laws but said this can be brought as an amendment in Week 7 CCR.
- LS noted that the SU doesn't set fees, nor does it hold a veto on JFSSAG, but plays a consultative role - this motion mandates advocacy.

- The SU should represent these positions on the annual percentage uplift, challenge unjustified fee rise proposal, support regular forums for overseas students to feedback, and ensure continuity in its strategy.
- Jesus JCR President queried if representatives could vote to amend mandate motions.
- EM, SU, stated that at the next CCR meeting the SU will bring a Bye-Law amendment that permits mandate amendments.

4. Dark Skies

Motion chaired by Keble JCR President (Deputy Co-Chair)

Proposed by: Eleanor Miller (VP for Undergraduate Education & Access), Lauren Schaefer (VP for Postgraduate Education & Access), Fahad Al-Huda (Kellogg MCR President)

- EM, SU, stated there was not an Equality Impact Assessment on marginalised groups within the community for the hasty Oxfordshire County Council's decision to turn of lighting between midnight-05:00.
- Accessibility concerns were raised.
- Despite the Council's U-turn on the decision, there has not been sufficient consultation.
- The risks to welfare of students, and other members of the community, outweigh light pollution concerns.

There were no comments or questions.

5. Supreme Court Ruling re Sex & Gender

Motion chaired by Exeter MCR President (Deputy Co-Chair)

Proposed by: Eleanor Miller (VP for Undergraduate Education & Access), Lauren Schaefer (VP for Postgraduate Education & Access), Fahad Al-Huda (Kellogg MCR President)

- EM, SU, proposed (alongside others) that the SU should call for, on behalf of students, University-led guidance to prevent policy disparity following the recent Supreme Court Ruling.
- Keble JCR President asked whether there's a timeline for guidance from the University, as students are anxious about the lack of direction.
- EM, SU, stated some Colleges are acting independently, creating inconsistent approaches which could be damaging to the welfare of students. The SU must pressure the University to lead on this and model best practices.
- Jesus JCR President supported the motion. They asked how Sabbatical Officers can engage tactically to avoid potential negative press while maintaining accountability.
- EM, SU, stated that the University must take a public and principled stance as an academic and EDI leader. Sabbatical Officers will engage with EDU and senior figures (e.g., Chief Diversity Officer) tactfully.
- Hertford JCR President expressed concerns about disparities between college policies due to their independence. They asked how risk of divergence can be minimised.

- EM, SU, emphasised that strong University guidance typically sets a precedent, and colleges tend to follow. Outliers with harmful approaches should be challenged by the SU and Common Rooms.
- St Hugh's JCR President highlighted that colleges are waiting for University direction and feel uncertain - the University must take the lead.

Comments for the motion:

- Somerville President: the SU's involvement would provide valuable support for students lobbying within their colleges and help give clear direction.
- St Anne's JCR President: a unified University policy would make it easier for colleges to follow suit.
- Oriel JCR President: the current lack of guidance is the problem - colleges need a reason to act.

Further comments:

- Brasenose JCR President warned that a mandated policy might have unintended consequences for trans individuals in sports contexts and advocated for the issue at hand to be raised sensitively and carefully
- LS & EM, SU, reassured that any engagement would involve collaboration with relevant stakeholders (including Trans+ students) to ensure policies are inclusive and sensitive.
- Motion received wide support

No opposition raised.

6. Ethical Investments Representations Review Sub-Committee

Motion chaired by Keble JCR President (Deputy Co-Chair)

Proposed by: Eleanor Miller (VP for Undergraduate Education & Access), Lauren Schaefer (VP for Postgraduate Education & Access), Fahad Al-Huda (Kellogg MCR President)

- EM, SU, proposed (alongside others) that the University should be sector leading in its ethical investments stance.
- A discussion surrounding the University's obligation to maximise profits to invest in student support was had. Are there legal obligations for profit margins?
- EM, SU, responded, the University does have fiduciary duties, but the University has partially divested from sectors like tobacco, arms, and fossil fuels, despite some financial losses. This is due to concerns around reputational risk and worries these investments conflicted with the University's charitable aims.
- St John's College has implemented a 2% investment limit in certain sectors. It was suggested this could serve as a case study to be explored by other colleges.
- EM, SU, acknowledged that the Oxford University Endowment Management (OUEM) team may already be reducing exposure to controversial investments. The importance of the SU advocating for formal policy change was emphasised.
- St Anne's JCR President spoke on their newly introduced Common Room Investment Rep who attends termly investment meetings with the College. There was a suggestion to standardise Common Room Investment Reps across Common Room Committees.

No opposition raised.

7. Motion to mandate action on the future of undergraduate admissions testing

Motion chaired by EM

Proposed by: Adam Daniel (Keble JCR President), Kush Vaidya (St Catz JCR President), Lucy Chen (Merton JCR President), Maria Sticlea (New JCR President), and Callum Turnbull (Balliol JCR President).

- Presented by Keble JCR President (on behalf of all proposers).
- Keble JCR President asked whether admissions tests are funded centrally (confirmed by EM that historically this cost burden has been shared between colleges and the university, but that the university has covered significant costs for the past two years, during this transition period).
- It was suggested that departments could cover costs to discourage unnecessary testing, but EM noted funding disparities between departments make this difficult. Both departments and colleges are in a situation where they are unwilling/unable to contribute more to testing financially.
- Brasenose JCR President highlighted College-level support for not charging students. They asked how the SU could formalise collaboration with the Conference of Colleges. The proposer agreed, noting poor central communication to colleges.
- Somerville JCR President reported college leaders oppose charging students. They questioned whether Oxford-only tests pose access barriers and therefore for them not to be considered.
- LS & EM, SU, clarified no final decision has been made. EM committed to voting in line with the Conference mandate and exploring alternative testing arrangements that don't harm access.
- St Hugh's JCR President: Shared that their College Bursar was unsure of financial implications of the admissions testing proposals, limiting decision-making.
- Magdalen JCR President: Warned against pushing departments to fund tests, which could lead to their removal - potentially harming access (as admissions tests can be advantageous for this).
- Wadham SU President stressed that test fees should not burden students. They supported fee waivers for APP groups.
- Motion should clarify support for keeping essential tests.
- Colleges need clearer guidance from the University.
- Strong consensus on the need for transparency and financial clarity.

Comments for the motion:

- Trinity JCR President spoke in favour; described the motion as comprehensive.
- St Hugh's JCR President reaffirmed support.
- Wadham SU President spoke to the psychological burden of admissions testing and the need for empathetic approaches to the motion
- Jesus JCR President stated the motion supports access goals.

Comments against the motion:

- Brasenose JCR President cautioned that if opposing admissions tests could lead to their removal, then this may harm access – therefore more research is needed. Not opposed to Oxford-only tests if they offer value for money.

Below the Line (final approval – not for discussion unless requested)

8. Trustee Board Matters

- Keble JCR President asked what members were being asked to vote on in relation to Trustees.
- EM, SU, explained that CCR was voting on extension of current co-opted External Trustees and noting the prior co-option of two student trustees.
- Brasenose JCR President asked whether CCR can mandate the Trustee Board.
- ET, SU, CCR replied stating that the new Bye-Laws made clear that the relationship is about finding collaborative approaches to achieving goals with the Board, not 'mandating'.

9. Recent consultations undertaken by the SU

No discussion.

10. VC's Notes

- St Catz JCR President & Brasenose JCR President asked whether the SU is providing guidance on the 'SMART Campaign'? They asked what the SU's stance is on the messaged and discussed the 'safe celebration' initiative that Common Room Presidents are working on.
- EM, SU, noted that they can arrange a meeting to discuss this and plan next year. SU was involved with SMART campaign communications from a safety perspective.
- LS, SU, noted that the University will never be in favour of "safe" trashing and will fine students due to the cost of clear-up.
- There was discussion around the University's rationale for restricting celebrations; with some stating it is not clear whether this is a sustainability initiative. There was uncertainty from some Presidents on if trashing is okay away from water - clarity needed.
- Oriel JCR President stated that blanket ban on trashing may not persuade students, but a sustainability approach may work alongside safety messaging.
- Green Templeton MCR President noted that the fine for trashing is unlikely to dissuade some students.
- ET, SU, suggested Common Room Reps bring this as a Week 7 motion

EM, SU, reminded all Common Room Presidents to vote online and flagged the Student Engagement inbox for any queries. She noted that Presidents will be asked all to fill out a Conference of Common Rooms evaluation survey. Voting will be open for a week for this Conference, longer than future voting windows due to potential technological issues.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 10th June (Week 7), 18:00-20:00, location (same): Lecture Theatre, H B Allen Centre.