Oxford SU

Conference of Common Rooms

18:00-20:00, Tuesday 10th June, 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: (subject to confirmation)

Apologies:

MCR Deputy Co-Chair

1. Introduction

- EM (Eleanor Miller) thanked those who had submitted motions and for continued common room engagement. A termly timetable for next academic year can be found online and feedback request for online (Transformation?) meeting.
- Rhys Inward, Jesus MCR President volunteered as substitute for MCR Deputy Co-Chair.
- Week 3 CCR Minutes approved by Conference

2. Governance Matters

AGM notes

- EM introduced Trustee Report and accounts
- Lincoln JCR: In future can the SU present a comparison of year-on-year spend so attendees can see annual changes?

3. Bye-Law Updates

EM presented the Bye-Law updates based on feedback from Common Room Presidents. Members will still retain power to suggest amendments. The updates concern amendments, conference policy and postholder delegated authority.

Questions:

- Keble JCR: does voting on Bye-Law amendments relate to the new powers given to Chair and Deputy Chairs?
- EM: the Bye-Law voting intersects, for example, if voting members want deputy chairs, then this would have consequences on other updates
- Jesus JCR: If the CCR voted one way but the common room decided to against it then what happens?
- Keble JCR: CCR outcomes only mandates the SU, not all common rooms, to act on the voting.
- EM: third bye-law update surrounds role of deputy chair requirements.
- Keble JCR: what is the rationale by rejecting a motion by deputy chair – clarified, when rejecting similar past motions, if the topic has substantial change, would this be covered as a similar motion and rejected?

- EM: The chair of the CCR will remain a member of trustee board and will have to act within those responsibilities, so will be a waste of the SU resources?
- Keble JCR: would the Board still maintain ruling?
- LS (Lauren Schaefer): yes, Board maintains ruling.
- ET (Emilie Tapping): Board comes first
- Keble JCR: Will they still have the opportunity to suggest amendments ect?
- EM: Yes, we will improve the process as we go
- St Catz JCR: If a member requests a below the line agenda item then can it be rejected by a postholder?
- Adam, Deputy JCR Co-Chair: deputy chairs could provisionally put an item below the line, but voting members can bring items above the line.
- EM: You can move it above the line in the byelaws.
- St Catz JCR: is it necessary for postholders to reject a request?
- ET: It's about maintaining this space for priority items, and also accountability actions if people disagree, e.g. if a post holder is acting outside of what is appropriate. It's more about not going over the same thing when there are other more important things to talk about.

St Catz JCR updated Conference on external trustee recruitment: announced Charlotte Sandberg as new a new external trustee for Oxford SU's Trustee Board.

4. Officer Year Round

- LS introduced Officer Year Round-Up, summarising EM and LS' role for the year, presenting committee representation, key projects worked on (and outcomes from their advocacy), extensive student engagement, launch of the new democratic structure, wider sector engagement, transformation committee and Trustee Board responsibilities

There were no comments or questions

5. Matters Arsing

LS provided action log update on the previous CCR motions

- Supreme Court Ruling – stakeholder engagement
- Dark Skies – represented SU (and Brookes Union) to County Council via a meeting forum and soon to submit a written submission
- Admissions testing - decision on admission testing will roll into next academic year
- EIRRS - EM attends weekly meetings will continue over Summer (no further updates)
- International fees – no substantial updates

There were no comments or questions

- EM reminded Conference of CCR timeline and important dates

Items for Discussion

6. Common Room Election Platform

Motion chaired by EM

Proposed by: Nick Lang (Keble JCR President-elect)

The current common room election process is not efficient. The manual processing of elections wastes common room committee and SI time. This motion calls for the SU expend resources to improve this process and implement automatic vote counting systems.

There were no questions.

Comments FOR the motion:

- Balliol JCR: supports motion, the wait for Balliol JCR election results was almost a week which left candidates in limbo.
- St Anne's JCR: agrees improving the voting system would be useful as St Anne's JCR no longer uses the SU voting platform, instead opting for a form which creates a separation between St Anne's JCR and the SU. A more efficient SU voting system would encourage a return.
- Wadham SU: Wadham SU's RO has fed back that the current SU platform is not good enough. Voting uptake is already challenging and an inefficient voting system reduces uptake further; any improvement would help.
- St Catz JCR: whatever the improvement, the secret ballot component should remain.

No comments AGAINST the motion raised.

7. Fee Model Consideration

Motion chaired by EM

Proposed by: Nick Lang (Keble JCR President-elect)

The previous motion passed at CCR concerning a SU stance on fixed fee models for international students, while admirable, lacked clarity. This motion would mandate the SU in evaluating different model options and assess the impact of each. The current system doesn't work, but the previous motion stance may not reflect best value to international students.

Questions:

- LS: would this motion supersede the previous motion?
- LS: questioned whether the level of consultation implied would be feasible given the limited time and resources of Sabbatical Officers. The concern was raised that a large-scale consultation may not be viable within the timeline.
- Keble JCR: emphasized that the previous proposal lacked an impact assessment, and that student consultation was crucial to properly understand concerns with the current fee system.
- LS: Sabbs in these meetings could advocate for fee transparency etc, throughout Michaelmas
- EM: reminded attendees that Sabbatical Officers act in students' best interests under existing bye-law discretion, so extensive mandates are not always necessary to justify action.
- New College JCR: would a consultation be led by the SU or the University?
- Adam, JCR Deputy Co-chair: stated that combining both motions would give Sabbs greater flexibility when advocating in committees.
- Merton MCR: Does this motion include graduates?
- Keble JCR clarified the motion is undergraduate-focused, as was the original.
- LS: the SU does not need motion for all committee decisions – research is needed for international students too.
- EM: Next academic year, if any MCR president wants to submit a graduate-specific motion then they can.

Comments FOR the motion:

- St Hugh's JCR: endorses the motion as it will better advocate for students to the university, regardless of department or background – one strict model would not work, it needs to be tailored in contact with proposers of previous motion. Flagged an interested individual who would like to support research into the specific motion area and will set up a group chat for those wanting to get involved.
- EM: Thanks, please keep SU involved in conversation.
- St Catz JCR: supports the research-based approach over extensive consultation, implying that data-driven analysis would be more productive and less resource-intensive.

No comments AGAINST the motion raised.

8. Oxford Water Safety

Motion chaired by MCR Deputy Co-chair

Proposed by: Rory McGlade (Brasenose JCR President)

Water safety is a large concern at Oxford, particularly during post-exam celebrations. More should be done by the university, students and the SU to improve water safety in Oxford. Due to the high number of waterways in Oxford, there should be a focus on safer approaches to water opposed to a blanket ban which may prove more harmful.

There were no questions.

Comments FOR the motion:

- Balliol JCR: the SMART (Safety Measures Around Rivers and Trashing) initiative might increase danger by pushing trashing and celebrations to more remote or less supervised locations.
- MCR Deputy Co-chair: asked to clarify if college-based trashing would be safer?
- Balliol JCR: believes it would have greater supervision.
- Wadham SU: A lot of University policy up until this point has been centred around 'out of sight out of mind', i.e. banning trashing in the centre of town doesn't protect anyone's safety. This University has a registered wild swimming society - there are clearly students swimming in the water ways around Oxford. There needs to be a registered recognition of this reality. SMART, lacking as it is, has not been well advertised to students, more needs to be done, even just on a comms level before we start addressing policy changes.
- Univ JCR affirms the above: the ban has not been well-communicated including how fines will operate and what power proctors hold.
- St John's JCR: we have been speaking about this topic recently, we oppose a ban, strict responses in colleges will push students to do unsafe things and bystander help would be better.
- Merton JCR: asked if encouraging colleges to take on a more active role in managing safe trashing would be best pursued through common rooms or centrally via the University?
- EM and LS: University can't force colleges to act. However, Sabbs could push the conversation forward in forums such as student safety groups. CCR should take sentiments discussed here back to common rooms and colleges.
- Trinity JCR: affirmed discussions had already, emphasizing the importance of swimming education and noted that many students never learn to swim, making awareness essential. Believes the University is more concerned with costs associated with student safety around waterways.
- Keble JCR: questioned the City Council's inconsistencies, noting designated swimming zones exist, undermining enforcement arguments.
- Jesus JCR: They have small signs around the bridge with details.
- Wadham SU: Areas of Port Meadow as an official bathing site may not be stable.

No comments AGAINST the motion raised.

9. EIRRS Expansion

Motion chaired by JCR Deputy Co-chair

Proposed by: Melinda Zhu (St Hilda's President), presented by Luca Di Bona

The current SU position on ethical investments is not strong enough. This motion expands on policy passed at Week 3 CCR and calls for an end to all direct and indirect investments in arms. Proposer understands that this will not happen overnight, but motion sets out a medium-term goal.

Questions:

- Keble JCR: do other universities have bans on indirect investments?
- LDB: Some are indirect, some are direct.
- EM: the University of York is the only known university with indirect investment policy
- LDB: this is likely the only Russell Group university, but there are likely others.
- Merton JCR: EM, can you tell us more about the climate in EIRRS currently in respect to these motions?
- EM: we shouldn't pass motions that are untenable. The current UK government places high emphasis on national defence. Within this context, calls for full arms divestment may be politically unfeasible. University direct investments are low, but should we not invest in nuclear defence for our country? We need to consider the financial impact on the University and the impact on scholarships.
- LDB: since at least 2020 the position of the SU is that the University shouldn't have any direct or indirect relationships with arms companies. Re. Britains (defence), it's hard to delineate between defensive and offensive weaponry, e.g. French government sold arms to Russia that were then used to invade Ukraine, showing that we can't control these weapons, except take a step back. Can't remember the exact number of the financial impact but lots of Unis have lots of endowments and portfolios that aren't in weaponry. Removing investments in fossil fuels, which the Uni has committed to do, takes out 4%, this would be half of that.
- St Catz JCR: two questions, regarding other universities that have divested from indirect investments (was this the university or the SU for example? (University of Birmingham has not divested but SU has taken a stance), second question, would a hardline stance from the SU weaken University relations?
- LDB: There are universities that have divestment policies that say they don't have investments in arms. Birmingham has a 10% cap, meaning that they won't invest in companies that get more than 10% of their profit in arms. Large number of Russell Group Students' Unions (RGSU) where this policy has been put in place. Wary to say the SU needs to be absolute about arms divestments, but wants to acknowledge that change takes time, and this is a medium-term goal. This motion establishes a strong position to compromise and have a discussion.
- Univ MCR: language of motion is setting us up for failure, i.e., insurance companies who invest in arms may be hard to mandate divestment from all companies – is complete divestment feasible, particularly indirect investment?
- Merton JCR: looking at York's investment policy, they have divested from companies with primary arms investment, but this motion is asking for much more.

- LBD: It's a goal of 5%, but it is up for negotiation with the University. They can find more info on universities later, and the CofE has established something similar. It's a work in progress.
- Keble JCR: if we ignore negotiating pitfalls of the motion, is the motion to accept Russian expansion into Europe and unarm Ukraine?
- LBD: the motion states the University should not be investing in any arms as they do not have control how these funds are spent.

Comments for the motion:

EM: interjects to remind members that the conversation needs to continue to be civil and respectful.

- Wadham SU: Called opposition to the motion a "dereliction of responsibility"; emphasized four prior Wadham SU motions aligned with this proposal. Highlighted ethical inconsistency of using university funds for militarization. This motion would be a good starting point to improve institutional ethics.
- Balliol JCR: ethical investment work is already underway, but institutional barriers persist - University pressure could help persuade colleges. In addition, at Oxford we should lead by example on this work and not wait for other institutions to act first.
- Univ MCR: Sat on investment committee at Univ, I am in support of motion, if we keep pushing the University and colleges will act. Understands charity law restrictions but principle of continuing the dialogue is important.
- Somerville MCR: At Oxford, there is a lens on us, if we pass this motion, we can empower more Universities to follow suit.

Comments against the motion:

- St Cats JCR, commends the proposers and SU on EIRRS consultation, broadly agrees with the motion but concerned the 5% cap could restrict investment in sustainable technologies (e.g. in mechanical/engineering sectors). Warned the motion could undermine SU-University communications and credibility.
- Keble JCR: Seconds above, argues the Week 3 motion already reflected the maximum feasible position. Worried the motion went against feedback gathered through SU consultation. Feared it would alienate student voices, particularly in colleges with mixed views.

Further comments:

- EM: SU has written two papers on the matter, majority of submissions called for divestment from all arms, EM policy position took this in consideration alongside the student responses for no divestment and sector feasibility
- LBD: Echos EM, consultation didn't say that students support the view specifically. It would have been good to have this discussion at the last CCR but the amendment

process wasn't in place. Re, weakening our negotiation position, if the Sabbs believe the best way to achieve goals is to ask for minimum standard then that isn't a significant weakening of position.

10. Keep Campsfield Closed

Motion chaired by JCR Deputy Co-chair

Proposed by: Eleanor Miller, presented by Faye Chang (Students Action for Refugees, STAR)

Presenter provided context of Campsfield House detention centre. The UK government seeks to re-open and increase capacity of the centre. UK has a policy of indefinite detention which presents concerning inhumane issues. This motion would oppose the reopening on the Centre.

Questions:

- FC (Faye Chang): asked to clarify what 'students as students' means when discussing matters concerning students?
- ET detailed SU charitable responsibility and resource conditions for direct student support as a SU
- Keble JCR: why would this be a conference policy opposed to a mandate? What is the difference?
- LS: There are parts of this motion that could never be a mandate because they don't affect students as students. It is financial resource which separates them; it does not cost substantial resource to raise an issue at a committee meeting, but it would be expensive to conduct extensive consultation and direct SU resource.
- Merton JCR: question on Conference policy, if this is the policy of SU, and Sabbs went to Subcommittee, would the Sabbs not have a responsibility to represent policy of SU?
- EM: that would be discretion of Sabb. Students feel strongly about issues beyond resource remit of SUs
- ET: for conference policy, three groups of people for conference to represent (student, university and NUS)
- Merton MCR: When does a proposed change to conference policy take effect, especially if an amendment isn't passed?
- ET: Oxford SU is currently piloting a new policy framework to make these decisions clearer. The rules and timeline for conference policy adoption and amendment are evolving, but the aim is to ensure flexibility while maintaining democratic legitimacy.

Comments for the motion:

- St Johns JCR: this is existing policy for our JCR. Noted that Oxford College Heads had signed a public letter opposing reopening. Called on the University and colleges to stand firm in opposition.
- Wadham SU: Already released a statement in Michaelmas highlighting systemic abuse at Campsfield (following the 2023 enquiry by Brooke House). Recently reaffirmed position by signing a Keep Campsfield Closed open letter. Reiterated that the University cannot claim to value sanctuary and simultaneously ignore the harm caused.
- St Anne's JCR: Emphasized that reopening is a regression, undermining earlier activist success in closing the centre. Proposed re-circulating the original open letter to reaffirm University response.
- Merton JCR: Highlight the inconsistency of two Oxford colleges with university of sanctuary status and existing refugee scholarships with not taking a stance.

No opposition raised.

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

11. Trustee Board Matters

12. Recent consultations undertaken by the SU

Date of next meeting: