

**Oxford SU Student Council Minutes (Draft)**

Date: 09/05/23

Time: 17:30

Venue: 4 Worcester Street and Online

Chair: Gabriel Lazar, Mansfield College

Present	Jade Calder, VP Education and Access Anna-Tina Jashapara, VP Charities and Community Shreya Dua, VP Graduates Grace Olusola, VP Welfare and Equal Opportunities Alfie Davis, Class Act Campaign Graduate Rep Zoe Edwards, UG Social Sciences Divisional Representative Daniel Tate, PG Social Sciences Divisional Representative Gabriel Lazar, Returning Officer and 29 other Council Members
Apologies	Yasmin Poole, Chair Michael-Akolade Ayodeji, President
Absent	Madelina Gordon, Women's Campaign Campaigning Officer

In Attendance	3 other Student Members
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A Welcome

Gabriel Lazar, Returning Officer, took the chair as Acting Chair and opened the meeting at 17:40.

The Acting Chair welcomed all those present and noted apologies from Yasmin Poole, Chair of Council, who was absent for the first part of the meeting, and from Michael-Akolade Ayodeji, President, who was also absent for the first part of the meeting.

RECEIVED**B Minutes and matters arising from the last meeting**

The Acting Chair confirmed that all actions arising from the previous meeting had been completed.

Council approved the minutes of the meeting on 25/04/23 as a true and accurate record.

APPROVED**C Sabbatical Trustees' Reports**

The Acting Chair noted reports and other papers could be found online.

C1 President

The President summarised his verbal report upon the Council Reconvening after his arrival (See: F1):

- Noted work on improving the SU's operational efficiency and effectiveness for students

- Noted work on Student resource hub development
- Noted current Priorities:
 - Upholding Freedom of Speech at Oxford: With help from the Chair of [the Conference of Colleges](#), plans to host events such as a roundtable discussion and lectures and also provide training resources to help [Common Rooms](#) and clubs to meet their obligations under the upcoming University Freedom of Speech Act.
 - Working on disability and inclusion following Disability Repcom
 - To create an SU disability guide to support [societies in creating inclusive environments](#)
 - Support for vac res appeals
 - SU Student Engagement strategy, feeding into new CEO's objective, engaging with Repcoms, Prescom, and set the stage for following Sabbatical Boards to boost engagement.

Inam Teja (Blackfriars) asked about what is being done to engage the next Sabbatical Boards with the Council. The President responded that they hoped that upcoming sabs should be involved with student democracy, however trinity being an examined term was likely to lead to disengagement. The President noted that the next Sabbatical Board had not been invited to attend Council, but that ordinary work such as committee shadowing was being undertaken to promote the Sabbatical Officers' understanding of their upcoming roles.

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C2 VP CHARITIES AND COMMUNITY

The VP summarised their written report, and:

- Noted the release of the sustainability demands tracker, how colleges are measured in their sustainability compliance and a meeting with [Environment & Ethics](#) reps which led to a change therein, and talks with colleges on joint hire of a sustainability staff member
- Noted the progress with the University on green investment
- Noted the keep Campsfield closed motions that are being proposed in [Common Rooms](#), and encouraged others to bring those motions
- Noted the university's sanctuary fair, discussing the needs of refugees in a series of panels, with a panel on Campsfield
- Noted her ongoing involvement with the City's student friendly Oxford strategy
- Noted the University's development district plan

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C3 VP ACCESS AND ACADEMIC AFFAIRS REPORT

The VP summarised their written report, and:

- Noted work with the School of Art to address class in art
- Noted work with Class act and International Students' Campaigns
- Noted the collation of the Sabs recommendations to the University on the end of their tenure
- Noted the event held with the DAS on students with SPLD
- Noted a meeting with the Director of UG studies on lecture recording

RECEIVED**C4 VP WELFARE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES REPORT**

The VP summarised their written report, and:

- Noted that the final event of the arts week had concluded in partnership with the Bodleian Library
- Noted that they intended to write a more comprehensive handover document, and pass over data to her successor
- Noted that welfare support for clubs was proceeding with support from mental health charities in Oxford

RECEIVED**C5 VP GRADUATES REPORT**

No written report had been submitted.

Action: Chair to inform Scrutiny Committee

The VP gave a verbal report:

- Noted a series of committees attended recently
- Noted projects including
 - A review of the EAF (Examinations and Assessment Framework), which is in discussion with EPS (Education Policy Support)
 - Links in with Disabilities, what are reasonable adjustments, can they be expanded outside of the Exam extensions
 - Longstanding disabilities and applying to Proctors for extensions with them
 - To help making Academic Appeals, a way of showing that professors may have a bias, which can be difficult to show without bringing up grades, which can be construed as questioning academic judgement which is not permitted
- Noted a proposal to change in academic representatives
 - To increase PG reps to reduce the burden on individuals and make commitments manageable, [so there will be two reps, representing the different types of postgraduate courses](#)
 - PGR – Postgraduate Research
 - PGT – Postgraduate Taught
- Noted that Postgraduate application fees were being removed, along with other changes to the application process such as removing CVs [to increase accessibility and equality in the process](#)
- Noted 15,000 responses to the cost of living form specifically regarding the hardship funding, a paper on which has been written to bring to various committees in order to try to expand support for Postgraduates.

RECEIVED**D Campaign Reports****D1 Women*s Campaign**

No representative being present, the Chair noted the report was available online.

D2 Class Act

No written report was submitted. The Chair moved to extend the deadline by two weeks. There was no opposition, and the motion was allowed to pass.

[Action: Chair to add receiving the report of the Class Act Campaign to the Agenda of the next Meeting of Council](#)

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Alfie Davis, Graduate Rep gave a verbal report:

- Noted that little has been able to be completed due to the small size of the Committee.
- Noted meeting with VP Access and Academic Affairs about Vacation Residence

RECEIVED**E Divisional Representative Reports****E1 Social Sciences Undergraduate**

Zoe Edwards, UG Social Sciences Divisional Representative, summarised the report, and:

- Noted discussions regarding updates to the DAS
- Noted a quiet term, as most issues were handled at the departmental level
- Referred those present to their report for further detail on meetings attended.

RECEIVED**E2 Social Sciences Postgraduate**

No written report was submitted, Daniel Tate, PG Social Sciences Divisional Representative, gave a verbal report:

- Noted that they had only come into the role recently after the resignation of their predecessor, and apologised that they had not had much time to be involved
- Noted an upcoming pilot to create ongoing representation in a committee of departmental representatives to create knowledge continuity
- Noted that they had submitted his thesis that day by way of explanation for not submitting a written report

RECEIVED**F Items for Resolution****F1 Project: Africa Day 2023: A Cultural Celebration with Jally Kebba Susso**

Abdel Dicko (Magdalen), was absent and the motion was not proposed. **The Acting Chair decided to adjourn for an unspecified period, during which time Yasmin Poole, Chair, arrived and took the chair, during this time Michael-Akolade Ayodeji, President, also arrived.**

Council Reconvened

Inam Teja (Blackfriars), raised a point of order, which was accepted, and raised a procedural motion to adjourn the motion until next meeting. The Chair sought opposition to the procedural motion. There was none, and the procedural motion was allowed to pass.

[Action: Steering Committee to add motion to the Agenda of the next meeting of Council](#)

F2 Financial Independence from the Oxford Union Society

Jade Calder (Wadham) invited those present to disclose any conflict of interest as being officers of the Oxford Union Society, such invitation was clarified by the Chair as not being compulsory, 3 of those present did so.

Jade Calder (Wadham) proposed the motion, summarising its contents.

Chris Collins (Corpus Christi) noted that the Union pays for diversity and inclusion training from the SU, and asked why the SU would want to suspend this training, and Jade Calder (Wadham) responded that they are aware of the importance of that training and would like it to continue, the VP Welfare noted that such things are in fact provided gratuitously so there was no effect on this training arising from the Motion.

Joe Bell (Merton) asked based on an earlier erroneous draft of the motion whether the SU had any public or private list of prohibited external organisations, and Jade Calder (Wadham) responded that there is no such list of organisations but rather a list of characteristics which were taken into account by the SU in making decisions regarding commercial relationships. They further noted that such organisations include those who may have links to human rights abuses or associations with companies/organisations that perpetrate human rights abuses. She would welcome a conversation about whether the Union's recent exploratory alleged agreement with Saudi-Arabian-funded think-tank could fall under that. Other things reasons beyond ties to human rights abuse include; animal rights abuse, those linked to licences sale of arms, fossil fuels, etc. She notes she imagines this list should be uncontroversial and reaffirms that there is no list of banned/prohibited organisations.

Joe Bell (Merton) asked whether the Union had been informed of the Motion being brought, and Jade Calder (Wadham) responded that they saw no need to do so.

Hamzah Sheikh (University) spoke in favour of the motion, having been racially harassed by a guest to the Union. They noted that they had video evidence of said harassment and wrote a full letter on their experience to the Standing Committee of the Union which did not undertake any satisfactory action. They further noted that on speaking with the Union President, they felt ignored by the Union. They further noted that since the Union is a commercial organisation its inability to be held to account was not clear prior to this. They further noted that the SU President informed them that they shouldn't take the issue to the Proctors as they had no power over the Union.

The SU President clarified that they did not suggest that they should not do so, but rather that it was of questionable value to take the issue to the Proctors as the Union is not susceptible to their powers.

Samuel (University) asked whether the proposer had any particular 'strong action' in mind, and Jade Calder (Wadham) responded that in their mind the motion was a strong action, but that they did not have any further actions specifically in mind but welcomed contributions on such.

Arya (Unknown) asked is there any commercial relationship beyond the fresher's fair, and Jade Calder (Wadham) responded that there is none to their knowledge.

Clay Nash (Brasenose) asked whether people have any particular suggestions for what they want to see, and a member responded that they want to realign the relationship between the two as viewing the Union as an employer. Trisha Burnaiya (St John's) noted that the start of Michaelmas was where the Union made access fees available.

Jade Calder (Wadham) ~~claimed~~ [stated their opinion](#) that many members who get memberships subsequent to seeing the Union as the Freshers' Fair tend to regret it, especially due to the operations of the Union which are discussed in the motion,

Joel (LGBTQ+ Cam) spoke to access concerns, stating that such should be dealt with within the Union not the SU.

Bulcsu (St John's) asked whether interaction with the Union on access would help reduce the problems noted in the motion, Jade Calder (Wadham) stated that the problems in the motions were not related to access. The member clarified that they intended to refer to the issues in the motion.

Andy (Jesus), raised a point of order, which was accepted, and proposed a procedural motion to open voting to all full members of council.

The Chair sought opposition. There was opposition and the Chair entertained speakers For and Against.

Niall Pearson-Shaul (Merton) – Against – Given that all voting members were notified of this motion in advance, there is no reason to permit those who have refused to engage in the process of the meeting to vote on the motion.

Joe Bell (Merton) – Against – This procedural motion is inappropriate as the motion may not come to a vote if it passes without opposition.

Kevin Wang (Keble) – For – There are many reasons that people may be absent, the widest possible group of people should be able to vote.

Jade Calder (Wadham) – Against – Those who have joined the meeting on teams can still vote.

Chris Collins (Corpus Christi) – For – I'm in favour of democracy. Corpus prefers to consult on any SU vote which might be controversial before voting.

Bella (LGBTQ+ Cam) – Against – The agenda is available online, there are no access barriers to knowing what is on it.

Luca (LGBTQ+ Cam) – Against – If anyone desires to consult their members before all votes, they need to propose structural changes to the voting process to enable such.

Samuel (University) – For – A good way of demonstrating the gesture's power would be to have a formal vote online.

Jade Calder (Wadham) – Against – This is not going to be an informal vote, formal votes still take place in person. Colleges have had plenty of time to seek opinions from members. Further, the recent change to in-person voting needs to have an attached incentive in order to foster student engagement.

There was a procedural discussion as to the new voting system in place.

Andy (University) withdrew the procedural motion.

Chris Collins (Corpus Christi) raised a point of order, which was accepted, and proposed a procedural motion to open voting to all full members of council.

The Chair adjourned the meeting for an unspecified period to finalise the in-person voting system.

Council reconvened.

At the Chair's discretion, Council moved to a vote on the procedural motion. The Returning Officer certified that the tally of votes was as follows:

For: 6

Against: 23

Abstaining: 4

As abstentions are not counted for the purposes of procedural motions the following percentages were certified:

For: 20.68%

Against: 79.3%

As the threshold for the procedural motion to pass is 25%, the procedural motion did not pass.

At the Chair's discretion, the President's report was entertained.

At the Chair's discretion, Council moved to a vote on the Motion. The Returning Officer certified that the tally of votes was as follows:

For: 25

Against: 3

Abstaining: 4

Hence, the following percentages were certified:

For: 78.13%

Against: 9.38%

Abstaining: 12.5%

As the threshold for a substantive motion to pass is 66.6%, the motion passed in the following form:

Council Notes:

1. The Oxford Union Society is a Private Members' Club that does not fall under the jurisdiction of the University.

2. The Oxford Union passed a motion in MT22 titled 'Independence from the SU' which restricted SU officeholders from simultaneously holding office in the Oxford Union.¹
3. The Oxford Union Governing Body Members can influence Oxford SU (i.e by virtue of being students who are free to engage in our democratic processes), however Oxford SU is not able to influence the Oxford Union. This has resulted in students, via the SU, being unable to properly check Oxford Union on matters related to bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination and data privacy breaches which affect students.
4. Under Oxford SU's Regulations, Regulation 17 explicitly states that the Oxford Union Society is an organisation which candidates in SU elections must declare their affiliation to.
5. There is a precedent for student bodies cutting ties with the Union; Wadham SU have previously passed a motion calling for a 'Boycott the Oxford Union Campaign' in 2019 (which was supported by Anneliese Dodds, MP for Oxford East & SU President 1999-2000).
6. There is a history of documented racial profiling and discrimination at Oxford Union events, including TT22, HT23 and MT19 (the latter with regards to the conduct towards Ebenezer Azamati)²³⁴.
7. There are data concerns as external security forces (i.e not British police) have been allowed to take photographs and take down names of students at Oxford Union events.
8. The University's Proctors Office has no jurisdiction over the Oxford Union, and therefore the Union does not have to answer to them regarding incidents of sexual violence and harassment on its grounds. Unlike many student societies, there is no external body to regulate or hold the Union accountable for its actions.
9. The Oxford Union is reliant on students taking on unpaid work, sometimes up to 40 days, otherwise known as 'vac days' in order to facilitate its operations. There is punishment if these vac days are not fulfilled.
10. Committee members are expected to attend Oxford Union meetings during the week which often clash with other academic commitments e.g classes and tutorials. Punitive measures exist for committee members who fail to attend these meetings, thus causing them to choose between their academic life and the Union.

¹ <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2022/10/07/union-president-elect-pushes-hypocritical-rules-change/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/education/video/2019/nov/18/oxford-union-security-staff-appear-to-manhandle-blind-student-video>

³ <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2023/02/23/racial-profiling-students-removed-and-threatened-arrests-protests-against-tzipi-hotovely-at-the-oxford-union/>

⁴ <https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2022/06/17/protest-at-union-event-hosting-israeli-ambassador-student-forcibly-removed-israeli-security-intimidation/>

11. The Union has a toxic culture of bullying and harassment, which it has thus far failed to resolve. Incidents have been repeatedly reported on by members, the student press and current / former committee members.⁵

12. The Oxford Union, as it is not a student society, pays for a commercial stall at Oxford SU's annual Freshers' Fair. This is the primary situation where the two organisations overlap and interact.

13. The standard rate of Oxford Union life (and 3+ years student) membership is currently £299.95. The 'access' rate is £178.50.⁶

14. The key issues in the SU's current strategy are: mental health and wellbeing, access, race equality, sustainability and sexual violence.

Council Believes:

1. The Oxford Union should be able to carry out its principles without creating a toxic environment which seems to encourage bullying, harassment, racial profiling and a systemic abuse of power.
2. Oxford SU should promote organisations which have adequate provisions to protect its members (i.e the student body).
3. Where it lacks direct influence, the SU still has a duty to lobby for change.
4. Where lobbying is not successful, the SU has a duty to take necessary actions to safeguard all members of the Oxford student community.
5. The Oxford Union has a vested interest in improving the environment it creates for its members.
6. Strong action by the SU can provide an impetus for the Oxford Union to improve itself for its members in the Oxford community.
7. The 'vac days' system is exploitative and takes away time from students that could otherwise be used for studying or taking on paid work.
8. The high cost of Oxford Union membership is antithetical to the SU's commitment to access.

Council Resolves:

1. To mandate the VP Welfare & Equal Opportunities and VP Access & Academic Affairs to review the SU's relationship with the Oxford Union.
2. To cease any and all commercial and financial relationships between the Oxford Union and SU until at least the mandate expires in three years.

RESOLVED

⁵ <https://www.theoxfordblue.co.uk/disrespectful-union-fashion-show/>

⁶ <https://oxford-union.org/pages/how-to-join>

Action: Chair to add the motion to the SU Policy Book

Joseph Bell (Merton) requested to propose F3 and F4 together, at the Chair's discretion this was permitted.

Joseph remarked that motion F3 was relatively simple, and only a repetition of the motion brought at last council, and that F4 merely implemented necessary rule changes contingent on F3's passage.

The Chair sought opposition. There was no opposition, and the Chair allowed the motions to pass, in the following forms:

F3 Working Group Rule Change Recommendations (Second Reading)

Council Notes:

1. It established the Working Group on SU Rules in Hilary Term, to produce proposals for amendments to the Bye-Laws and Regulations, and rules, by the first meeting of Trinity.
2. The Working Group's report (available), containing a set of proposed amendments to the Bye-Laws and Regulations, which include
 - a. various formal changes to improve clarity,
 - b. formalising the Board-imposed 4% quorum for binding Referendums,
 - c. giving Council the power to set its own quorum (and procedure) and the duties of the Scrutiny Committee, and expanding Scrutiny Committee to at least 3 students, with at least one Graduate,
 - d. a prescribed procedure for annual Student Members' Meetings, including the required approval of affiliations with External Organisations,
 - e. replacing vague campaign election rules with clearer Campaign appointment provisions, which require the election of the (co-)Chairs,
 - f. when there is no Returning Officer, having a member of the Election Committee take over political elements of the role, as opposed to a Sabbatical Trustee, and
 - g. formally specifying that there should be 3 Student Trustees and setting a deadline for By-elections.
3. Amendments to the Bye-Laws and Regulations require approval by Council at two successive meetings.

Council Believes:

1. The proposals are sensible and will improve governance and procedural clarity at the SU.

Council Resolves:

1. To approve the proposed amendments of the report in full.

Action: Chair to update the relevant Bye-Laws and Regulations upon the approval of Trustee Board and the University

F4 Working Group Rule Change Recommendations (Rules of Council)

Council Notes:

1. Some small alterations to the Rules of Council are required to give effect to the proposed Bye-Law changes of the Working Group on Rules.

Council Believes:

1. The below changes should be made.

Council Resolves:

1. To make the proposed changes to the Rules of Council, to take effect when the relevant Bye-Law and Regulation changes do:
 - a. expand Scrutiny Committee to three members including at least one graduate, and move the election to Hilary term. Require them to table no confidence motions when a Student Member reasonably requests they do (for anonymity).
 - b. Remove superseded RO selection provisions, but add new Council-specific protections in cases of a conflict of interest.
 - c. Set the quorum at the minimum 15 member level, and detail a specific procedure for inquorate meetings.
 - d. Give Council well-specified procedures for extending Campaign report deadlines, and a reasonable procedure for when reports are not provided.
 - e. Various tweaks to correct earlier errors and minor details.

RESOLVED

Action: Chair to update Rules of Council when the relevant Bye-Laws and Regulations come into effect

The SU President thanked the Former RO for his work on the Working Group to amend the rules. The Chair also thanked the whole working group. At the Chair's discretion, applause was entertained.

G Items for Discussion**G1 Implementation of another PG Divisional rep**

The VP Graduates introduced the item, remarking that they are considering creating a second PG Divisional Rep role to each division, so there would be Taught and Research PG Divisional Reps. The VP noted that the burden on reps is large because each division contained multiple departments, and that in the past reps have resigned due to workload. In order to reduce the burden, support the ability of PG reps to advocate for their colleagues in committees where they are the only student reps. The VP noted that for many PGs, interaction with colleges is so low that there is not a possibility for MCRs to fill this role, therefore PG Divisional Reps are the appropriate avenue.

The VP Graduates clarified at the Chair's request that they wanted to know whether Council approved of the Taught/Research Division, how Council suggested that camaraderie could be built between PG Reps, and how council would suggest Reps be selected, such as by appointment as now, rather than elections.

The Chair opened the floor to those present.

Inam Teja (Blackfriars) noted that the Taught/Research division is a good idea, as they often have different needs. Further noted that they have no significant feelings on elections or appointment but they felt that the increased competence which came from interviews and appointments rather than elections was a boon.

Wang (Keble) offered support to the proposition as PGs are often underrepresented.

Jonathan (Blackfriars) selection could be during Michaelmas for Taught Courses and Hilary/Trinity for Research courses.

Niall Pearson-Shaul (Merton) Noted that to his understanding taught courses were shorter than research courses. Would there be a problem in taught courses having higher turnover?

The VP Graduates replied that most PG courses are equal in length and even if they weren't most reps wouldn't want to serve multiple years

The VP Access and Acaf stated their opposition to elections due to low candidacy, however that as more focus is put on the system elections may become viable as engagement increases.

The VP Graduates agreed that elections should be postponed.

Joe Bell (Merton) Sometimes the SU changes practise without making necessary rule changes, are you aware that Bylaw changes are necessary?

The VP Graduates confirmed that they are aware.

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H **Any Other Business**

The Chair opened the floor for any other business.

There was no business.

The Chair brought the meeting to a close at 19:43.

Action Note	Responsibility
Inform Scrutiny Committee of the VP Graduates' failure to submit report.	Chair
Chair to add receiving the written report of the Class Act Campaign to the agenda of the next meeting of Council	Chair
Steering Committee to add motion to the Agenda of the next meeting of Council	Chair
Update SU Policy Book to reflect Item F2	Chair
Investigate ... and report back Update the relevant Bye-Laws and Regulations according to Item F3 upon the approval of Trustee Board and the University	VP ...Chair
Chair to update Rules of Council according to Item F4 when the relevant Bye-Laws and Regulations according to Item F3 come into effect	Chair

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