

Oxford SU

Conference of Common Rooms

19:00-21:00, Tuesday 12th May

Earth Sciences Lecture Theatre, Department of Earth Sciences

Minutes

Present: Shermar Pryce (SP), President for Communities and Common Rooms; Seun Sowunmi (SS), SU President for Undergraduates; Alisa Brown (AB), SU President for Welfare, Equity & Inclusion

Chair: Shermar Pryce (President for Community & Common Rooms)

Deputy Chairs:

- Vacant (JCR President)
- Rhys Inward (MCR President)

In attendance:

Balliol MCR	Kellogg MCR	St. Catz JCR
Exeter JCR	Linacre MCR	St. John's JCR
Green Templeton College MCR	Lincoln MCR	St.Catz MCR
Herford JCR	Magdalen JCR	St.Hilda's JCR
Herford JCR	Merton JCR	Trinity JCR
Harris Manchester MCR	Pembroke JCR	Wadham SU
Jesus MCR	St. Anne's JCR	Wolfson MCR
	St. Antony's GCR	Worcester JCR

Apologies: Wantoe Wantoe (WW), SU President for Postgraduates; Rhys Inward

1. Introduction

- SP welcomed attendees and provided a summary of the agenda.

2. Governance Matters

- The Chair outlined the process to elect a Deputy Chair to CCR and welcomed nominees for JCR and MCR Deputy Chair.
- The minutes from HT W7 were introduced and ratified with no objections.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Officer Updates

- SP explained all attendees should have received the Action Log Updates table in advance of the meeting. Asked for questions.

Questions:

- Catz MCR: asked where the College Disparities Monitor was on the website.
- SP: confirmed the monitor is live and invited feedback.
- Representative: asked whether there is a motion for discounts on buses.
- SP: confirmed there is a live motion, and the focus is currently on graduates living in further away colleges like St Hugh's. Will feedback as progress is made.
- Catz MCR: enquired about the OUEM webinar
- SP: confirmed the OUEM webinar will be open to all and will include a Q&A
- Catz MCR: asked for elaborations on scoping conversations about a guarantor service.
- SU CEO: the SU has asked the university to form a relationship with a guarantor service. Awaiting the Estates Team response. If this does not happen, the SU can pursue this. A grant funding bid was successful, and a housing advisor will subsequently be recruited in the next financial year (August 2026).

Items for Discussion

4. Referendum to disaffiliate from NUS UK

Proposed by: Luke Liang, Part-Time Officer for Black and Ethnic Minorities Students

Seconded by: Alisa Brown, President for Welfare, Equity and Inclusion; Seun Sowunmi, President for Undergraduates; Valerie Mann, Part-Time Officer for LGBTQ+ Students

Decision Type: Conference Mandate

Presented by: Luke Liang, Part-Time Officer for Black and Ethnic Minorities Students

Despite costing the SU £17500 every year, the NUS has failed to deliver for students' interests. This motion initiates the process for the SU to hold a referendum to decide whether the student body would like to remain affiliated with the NUS.

Questions:

- Lincoln MCR: asked whether alternatives to the NUS, such as Russell Group Students' Unions (RGSU), may be better attuned to student needs.
- AB: explained that Oxford SU is also a member of RGSU, though it has a different remit. Reflected that many issues experienced across Russell Group universities are comparable and can be addressed collaboratively through this forum.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: argued that successful student activism has often resulted from the work of individual students' unions rather than the NUS centrally.
- Harris Manchester JCR: asked how Oxford students currently engage with the NUS.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: stated that they were uncertain regarding the current representative structures.
- SS: explained that Oxford SU previously elected NUS delegates, though engagement is now primarily undertaken through Sabbatical Officers and SU

Presidents. Noted recent attendance at an NUS-organised Student Finance Parliament event.

- AB: added that Sabbatical Officers retain delegate positions and decide whether participation in NUS activities is an effective use of officer time. Previous officers had suggested that engagement was not always beneficial.
- SP: confirmed that Oxford SU retains voting rights within the NUS.
- St Catz MCR: asked about quorum requirements for the referendum.
- SP: confirmed that, under SU bylaws, quorum is 5% with a simple majority determining the outcome. Timing would therefore be an important consideration.
- St Catz MCR: asked why Oxford SU's affiliation fee is comparatively high.
- SU CEO: explained that the affiliation fee is calculated as a proportion of the University block grant.
- Incoming President for Undergraduates: suggested that turnout could be maximised if the referendum were held alongside SU elections.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: agreed this may increase turnout, though noted that other students' unions had found many students voted without understanding the role of the NUS.
- Wadham SU: asked how feasible reform of the NUS would be from within the organisation.
- SP: argued that lobbying can be undertaken independently and collaboratively with other students' unions without requiring NUS affiliation.
- AB: stated that there have been multiple opportunities for reform but expressed concern that some issues may be systemic due to the scale of the organisation.
- SS: agreed with SP and AB, suggesting that temporary disaffiliation may be appropriate until meaningful reform occurs.
- Lincoln MCR: asked whether it is possible to support the principle of national student representation while advocating for reform from within the NUS.
- AB: responded that the referendum itself demonstrates that students wish to see substantial change and provides an opportunity for students to express their views directly.
- Magdalen JCR: asked whether an informational document outlining arguments for and against affiliation would be produced.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: agreed that this would be beneficial.
- SU CEO: confirmed that there would be opportunities for both "Yes" and "No" campaign groups to organise during the referendum period.
- Merton JCR: asked what benefits Oxford SU would lose through disaffiliation.
- SP: noted that Oxford SU would lose its formal relationship with the NUS, including access to representative training and events, though recent engagement with these opportunities had been limited.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: noted that student representative systems in several European countries function effectively without an equivalent national union.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: also highlighted that alternative liberation-focused conferences and networks exist outside the NUS structure.
- St Antony's MCR: asked whether there were proposals for reallocating the affiliation fee should disaffiliation occur, suggesting that the funds could instead support student solidarity and activism initiatives.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: agreed.

- SU CEO: stated that students should determine how any future savings are allocated. Also noted that disaffiliation would take approximately 12 months to take effect financially.
- SP: proposed that, should the motion pass, the timing of any referendum be deferred to the Week 7 CCR meeting for further consideration. No objections were raised.

5. College Library Access Motion

Proposed by: St. Catherine's MCR

Decision Type: Conference Mandate

Presented by: Xiangyue Wang, St. Catherine's MCR

The College Library Access Motion mandates the sabbatical officers to advocate at the Conference of Colleges and any relevant committee for the open access of college libraries to all University of Oxford students.

Questions:

- Linacre MCR: asked whether this was a new motion.
- St Catz MCR: confirmed that this was a new proposal developed through the MCR.
- Merton JCR: questioned whether lack of access represented a significant issue, noting that librarians will often permit access upon request and that many colleges already have sufficient resources.
- St Catz MCR: responded that this flexibility often applies primarily to special collections rather than general access.
- Lincoln MCR: expressed support for the principle of the motion, particularly from a postgraduate perspective, but noted that college libraries are administered by colleges rather than centrally by the University and may face security concerns.
- AB: highlighted that the motion specifically references advocacy through the Conference of Colleges.
- SP: agreed that colleges could not be formally compelled through CCR motions.
- Kellogg MCR: suggested that borrowing rights may be more contentious than access rights, particularly for smaller libraries, and proposed an amendment limiting the motion accordingly.
- St Catz MCR: accepted the amendment.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: raised practical questions regarding card access systems and noted that students may become frustrated by increased pressure on existing study spaces.
- Pembroke JCR: asked how colleges would ensure that their own members retain adequate access to library spaces.
- Wolfson MCR: suggested that reforming and expanding the library catalogue and request system may be a more practical solution.
- Wadham SU: agreed that broader access to resources is desirable but cautioned that uneven demand between libraries could create practical difficulties.
- Merton JCR: observed that Oxford's current library structure is comparable to many other universities and suggested that improving borrowing systems may be more realistic than universal access.

- Harris Manchester JCR: expressed support for the principle of the motion and argued that practical challenges should not prevent efforts to improve access.
- St Catz JCR: suggested designated periods of open access as a possible compromise.
- St Catz MCR: reiterated that the motion seeks primarily to empower Sabbatical Officers to advocate for improved access to library resources and borrowing systems across the University.

6. University-Wide Term Card

Proposed by: Luke Liang, Part-Time Officer for Black and Ethnic Minorities Students

Seconded by: Alisa Brown, President for Welfare, Equity and Inclusion; Shermar Pryce, President for Communities and Common Rooms

Decision Type: Conference Mandate

Presented by: Luke Liang, Part-Time Officer for Black and Ethnic Minorities Students

This motion would mandate sabbatical officers to lobby the university to promote university society events, an online database where societies can publicise their events across the student body.

Questions:

- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: explained that the motion seeks to provide a practical solution to an observed problem regarding the visibility of student events.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: asked how the proposed platform would become the central location for information given the prevalence of independently produced term cards.
- Merton JCR: questioned how the volume of information would be managed and whether college societies would also be included. Noted that the logistical demands of maintaining a comprehensive platform may be significant.
- GTC: asked what the benefits of a centralised term card would be and how events would be organised fairly.
- Black and Ethnic Minorities Students PTO: explained that the proposal imagines a public noticeboard-style platform administered by the SU, with societies able to submit events directly for approval and publication.

7. Opposition to Unethical Uses of AI

Proposed by: St. Catherine's MCR

Decision Type: Conference Mandate

Presented by: Xiangyue Wang, St. Catherine's MCR

This motion mandates the Sabbatical Officers to advocate at the University Council and any relevant committee to require all of its AI vendors to have a policy that forbids military and surveillance use of its products.

Questions:

- GTC: asked whether similar concerns should apply to Microsoft technologies currently used by the University.
- St Catz MCR: responded that the motion specifically concerns AI services due to their greater potential for harm and autonomous military application compared to other technologies.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: expressed support for the motion and raised concerns regarding Oxford's partnership with OpenAI through ChatGPT Edu. Argued that greater transparency and ethical standards are needed in procurement decisions relating to AI technologies.
- Wadham SU: asked why OpenAI's current policies had not been explicitly referenced within the motion.
- St Catz MCR: explained that the wording was intentionally broader so that the motion applies generally to AI vendors rather than solely OpenAI. Also noted that amendments had been made during the risk assessment process.
- SP: informed representatives that the University is already aware of concerns raised by staff and students regarding AI partnerships. Noted that senior University officers have acknowledged growing concern and that some vendor agreements will be reviewed in the coming years. Encouraged students to continue providing feedback to the University.

8. Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse & Intersex Inclusion

Proposed by: Valerie Mann, LGBTQ+ Officer

Seconded by: Alisa Brown, President for Welfare, Equity and Inclusion; Shermar Pryce, President for Communities and Common Rooms

Decision Type: Conference mandate

Presented by:

Mandate to Reaffirm Support for Trans, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse and Intersex Rights and Oppose Regressive Legal Interpretations

Questions:

- Lincoln MCR: raised concerns regarding the recent rowing policy and asked where the SU stands on the issue, particularly regarding the involvement of the Proctors.
- Magdalen JCR: noted that Magdalen JCR currently operates its own Gender Expression Fund of up to £1,000 and questioned whether the SU fund would be sufficient to meet student demand.
- Harris Manchester JCR: asked what changes this motion introduces compared to previous policy.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: explained that the motion builds upon and expands previous policy rather than replacing it. Clarified that the SU Gender Expression Fund currently supports approximately 20 students annually, with students generally encouraged to first access college-level support where available. Also stated that the SU remains strongly supportive of trans and non-binary students and is actively engaged with concerns surrounding the rowing policy.
- SU CEO: noted that the Gender Expression Fund currently exists to support students requiring assistance with gender affirmation costs.

- AB: explained that the University's updated rowing policy requires students to row according to their sex assigned at birth. Confirmed attendance at an upcoming SSSC meeting where student concerns regarding the policy would be raised and welcomed students to provide feedback directly. Also confirmed that the SU Gender Expression Fund will increase from £400 to £1,000.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: highlighted difficulties in identifying venues with gender-neutral toilets that are not solely accessible toilets when organising LGBTQ+ Society events.
- Wadham SU: noted that Wadham College Boat Club had recently released a statement regarding the rowing policy.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: acknowledged statements and protest actions organised by multiple college boat clubs and student groups.
- St Catz MCR: noted that TNBI+ students may also face increased risks of homelessness and financial abandonment and asked whether future work could include support towards educational costs.
- LGBTQ+ PTO: highlighted existing resource lists maintained by the LGBTQ+ Society for students requiring immediate support.
- SU CEO: welcomed feedback regarding additional resources that could be added to SU Advice pages.

9. Student Welfare and Support Services Workshop: Student Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy

The SU welcomed colleagues from Student Welfare and Support Services to deliver a session on the Student Wellbeing and Mental Health strategy. Representatives were asked to give feedback on three key areas of the strategy, including ways of relating to ourselves, ways of relating to others, and personal and self-management skills. A wider form was shared with attendees to facilitate common room feedback.

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

10. Dark Skies (updated)

11 AOB:

Date of next meeting (to follow the AGM, 18:00-19:00): Tuesday 09th June (Week 7), 19:00-20:00, location: Lecture Theatre, H B Allen Centre.