



Oxford SU
Conference of Common Rooms
18:00-20:00, Monday 24th November, HB Allen Centre, Keble College
Minutes

Present:

Shermar Pryce, President for Communities and Common Rooms; Seun Sowunmi, SU President for Undergraduates; Alisa Brown, SU President for Welfare, Equity & Inclusion

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

Deputy Chairs:

- Janek Czarnek (JCR President – Magdalen)
- Rhys Inward (MCR President - Jesus)

In attendance:

Campion Hall MCR
Corpus Christi MCR
Green Templeton MCR
Hertford MCR
Jesus MCR
Keble MCR
Lincoln JCR
Lincoln MCR
Linacre MCR

Magdalen JCR
Merton JCR
Merton MCR
New JCR
Pembroke JCR
Regent's Park MCR
Somerville MCR
St Anne's JCR
St Catz MCR
St Hilda's MCR

St Hugh's JCR
St John's JCR
Trinity JCR
Trinity MCR
Univ JCR
Univ MCR
Wadham MCR
Wadham SU
Worcester JCR

Apologies: Wantoe Wantoe, SU President for Postgraduates

1. Introduction

- SP provided a brief update.
- This is Janek's final meeting and next meeting will include the election of a new JCR Deputy Chair.

2. Governance Matters

- Week 3 Minutes ratified – pending St John's JCR added as attendee.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Officer Updates

- SP updated on committee engagement, noting attendance at 27 committees.
- AB provided an update on RepComs and concerns raised regarding communications and other feedback for improvement.
- SP discussed the Community Fund projects and events and introduced Part-Time Officers.
- Rag Officer introduced Candy Cane Delivery Service and encouraged common room engagement. With the fundraising effort.

Questions:

- No questions were raised.

3.2 Officer Action Log

SU Presidents discussed updates on the Action Log:

- College Disparities (SP) - progress pending JCR and MCR elections concluding on Friday. SP will circulate an email for those unable to attend MCR PresCom.

- International Student Levy (SS) - SS reported representation against the proposed levy, including work with the Joint Fees and Student Support Advisory Group (JFSSAG) and MP Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East).

A student asked how Oxford SU can influence national policy; SS explained that action depends on formal announcement of the levy.

- National Hardship (SS) - discussed when meeting held with the Lord Mayor. Updates expected before the end of the year. The SU continues advocating for improved travel affordability and aim to meet with Brookes Union to discuss their approaches to travel support.

- Common Room election platform (SP) - should have automated results and notifications by the New Year.

- Supreme Court Ruling (AB) – AB provided an update on relevant University working group and raised concerns about leaks concerning the EHRC. AB reported supportive discussions with Anneliese Dodds regarding trans+ rights. Impact Associates have completed a benchmarking and literature review of UK partnerships' approach to trans+ support before and after the Supreme Court ruling which will support AB's representative work. AB expressed thanks to Roxi and Iryne.

- Student asked how can students input trans+ university workstreams?

- AB, I will see if we can have a discussion on the recommendations with broader students to provide further student feedback

- Dark Skies (SP) - SP reported that due to University and student pushback, the plans for 'dark skies' have been deferred, but SU will closely monitor activity.

- Water safety (SP) - Rollout of the Think Twice campaign this term has been effective. Phase two planned for early Hilary. AB noted ongoing engagement with MPs on safe celebration concerns, particularly displacement of students to unsafe areas away from the City Centre.

- Admissions testing (SS) - SS reiterated that additional testing fees should not fall on students and advocated for stronger support for access-background applicants.

- Ethical Investment Representations Review Subcommittee (EIRRS) (AB) - currently trying to organise an OUEM representative to attend the next CCR to discuss updates. SP noted to CCR that we can invite other University representatives to speak on matters also

Items for Discussion

4. Transforming University Sports Facilities to Meet Student Needs

Proposed by: Shermar Pryce, President for Communities and Common Rooms; Seun Sowunmi, SU President for Undergraduates; Wantoe Wantoe, SU President for Postgraduates; Alisa Brown, SU President for Welfare, Equity & Inclusion

Decision Type: Conference Policy

Presented by: Alisa Brown, SU President for Welfare, Equity & Inclusion

AB introduced the motion, emphasising that sport and physical activity are essential to student welfare and that current University provision is inadequate and inaccessible. The mandate commits AB to working more directly with University Sport to advance welfare-driven improvements and advocates for CCR to use its collective voice to call for equitable and centralised sports provision.

Questions:

- Keble JCR queried the status of the motion; AB agreed it should be amended to a mandate rather than a policy.

Comments FOR the motion:

- Somerville MCR: Agreed with the proposal.
- St Hugh's JCR: Asked whether facilities outside the city centre would be considered, noting challenges for colleges further out.
- AB: Primary focus must remain central access, though wider considerations can be raised.
- Jesus MCR: Suggested exploring community sport centres and better advertisement of the University Club.
- AB: Some local facilities, including Iffley Road Sports Centre is not fit for purpose due to asbestos. Short-term fixes show willingness from the University, but long-term development is needed. University Club is not very accessible but will look into this as a short-term option while in post.
- Corpus MCR: Expressed concern that centrality-focused language might detract from wider facility needs.
- AB: The motion acknowledges wider reviews and redevelopment; the VC has shown support.

Comments AGAINST the motion:

- Jesus MCR: Proper redevelopment focus should be required, needs big investment now and not slow investment or short-term fixes.
- AB: Confirmed involvement in the Sports Strategic Subcommittee and intention to integrate CCR feedback into long-term planning.

5. SU Sessions

1. exams and assessments

SS announced an upcoming student consultation on assessments, referencing their sitting on Taught Degrees and Awards Panel (TDAP) and potential upcoming exam changes.

Discussion

- Lincoln MCR, Feedback from MCR, some students experienced a lack of guidance on what to expect from exams, including traditions, and concerns about all-or-nothing exams; little awareness of mitigating circumstances.
- Magdalen JCR: Many students do not know how to apply for mitigating circumstances.
- St Catz MCR: Asked whether students want air conditioning in exams.
- Lincoln JCR: Tent outside Exam Schools too hot; health hazard and off-putting for exams.
- Magdalen JCR: Appreciated tent for shade.
- Keble JCR: For consultation communication, use common room channels, we have access to channels not available to SU.
- AB: Agreed and thanked those who helped share Proctors survey.
- Somerville MCR: Asked how divisions/departments can support communications.
- MCR President: Send President emails with things to share, perhaps a President newsletter?
- Lincoln JCR: Prelims/collections during Freshers' period detract from induction.
- Keble JCR: Timetabling is not good, exams sometimes start earlier and finish later which creates a much longer exam period, and no one can make internship plans which is stressful. There needs to be a better exam window and earlier communication of timetable.
- Campion Hall MCR: Was not told if exams were computer-based or written which is not accessible. Noise and disruptions to exams need more consideration, some students do not take exams in exam schools due to access and college spaces can be very noisy, creates further barriers.
- AB: Spoke anecdotally on access concerns which meant friend who isolated during exams as they got given guidance early and kept excluded due to fear of leak
- Jesus MCR: Exam results are often delayed which creates uncertainty.
- Several Representatives asked about incentives to engage with survey, for example, ball tickets, alpaca visits (for college with most responses), G&D gift cards.
- St Catz JCR: Alpaca visit at the Bodleian was very popular.
- Lincoln MCR: Give us as much notice as possible and a long survey window to best engagement.
- Keble JCR: Do not launch the consultation until after the vacation.

2. Common Room Support

SP requested input from attendees on what the SU can do to better support common rooms? Examples included committee handover support, training and development opportunities, compliance support, advice and events planning.

Discussion

- St Catz MCR: We need more power as a student body, financial and political, CCR is advisory and advocating, but may not always have impact. We need a guarantee and more motions coming to CCR.
- SP: Agreed, CCR needs more teeth.
- St Anne's JCR: Envisioned CCR work similarly to JCR items. At JCR PresCom, motions pass, raised at college, and sometimes rejected – but CCR has been giving good updates from motions.
- St Catz MCR: Speaking from undergraduate experience where student body had 3 million each year to distribute to student groups, this level of resource had huge impact.
- Lincoln MCR: Being a MCR President can be exhausting, especially during busy periods such as Freshers'. We need more support for Presidents.
- Jesus MCR: Good practice is happening in some colleges but not always shared. The SU could bring these views together and help with consistency.
- Lincoln MCR: A new Presidents training each term (acts as a forum for introducing peers too) could be beneficial.
- AB: Sabbs, tour college staff, SP speaks directly to College Heads. I tour colleges to review welfare provision; this will continue during the vac. We can better explore staff support.
- Keble JCR: College disparities work will help dealing with colleges, could we have guidance on dealing with rent negotiations for example?
- SS: SU previously had rent negotiation sessions.
- SP: Will be engaging with Domestic Bursars Committee. I could bring an agenda item to ask what they need from students/what they want from students? Rent increases often happen but a 'why' is not always provided.
- Jesus MCR: Common room representative conversations with the colleges presents a power imbalance. Staff know cost and politics which can cause them to dominate conversations.
- Representatives called for CCR to pool data on rent costs to get ahead of these discussions.
- Jesus MCR: SU could facilitate informal discussions to gather this data.
- Lincoln MCR: College power comes from common room representatives not engaging with each other and understanding disparity, united force will empower negotiations.
- AB: Can representatives elaborate on stressors/capacity issues during Freshers' period?
- Lincoln MCR: Presidents need to plug committee gaps, host events and run common room inductions in colleges. This creates anxiety due to pressure and personal workload resulting in sleep deprivation, resource scarcity and high expectations from colleges sometimes not being met.
- St Catz MCR: This is the same at Catz.
- Somerville MCR: There are keen committee members who are only around for one year resulting in committee gaps emerging. DPhil students (those around for longer) take more responsibility and are left to carry out handover.
- Trinity MCR: Freshers' and handover present substantial work. Work starts early, executive teams in common rooms are expected to perform right away which requires

month ahead planning (many are on vacation and unable). The SU can help with forward planning.

- Linacre MCR: Committee handover comes in many forms. Posts have high turnover and lots of gaps. Documentation for current student leaders needs improvement. Perhaps handover documents and templates could be shared and leaders encouraged to fill out throughout year. Common Rooms should have constitution stating proportion of executive are given handover role for the following year to support. This would help with stakeholder engagement and comms navigation.
- AB: Acknowledged issues and affirmed SU will explore how they can resource this support.
- RAG Officer: Part-time Officers (PTOs) can help with supporting common rooms with events. For example, RAG can support with charities events.

3. Elections

The SU has recruited a new Democracy Coordinator who delivered a session launching the Hilary term Elections, this included the Sabbatical Officer positions, Part-time Officer positions and Student Trustee positions. A timeline was provided for the campaign, and attendees were invited to express interest in available roles, 'refer a friend' and assist with the promotion of the suite of roles.

4. CCR reflections

SP called on attendees to reflect on the CCR Pilot thus far with reference to impact reporting from the SU, communications and meeting structure.

Discussion:

- St Catz MCR: we need to introduce a stronger appeals process – there should be a student appeal process?
- Somerville MCR: Timeline to vote and timeline for agenda should be extended as there is not enough time to review. CCR frequency could remain, but the structure could change to W3 CCR as presenting motions then W7 CCR discussion.
- SP: We are seeing greater in-person attendance than online votes, suggesting barriers online, we should explore these ideas.
- AB: Want to know broader thoughts, as nominated leaders are representing is further consultation required?
- Somerville MCR: fine but did not know this. The SU needs to better educate common rooms on role of representatives at CCR. Some common rooms do not know the role of elected member and voting representation.
- Keble JCR: Representative model should mean not holding all common room member vote, it's about representative
- Lincoln MCR: We still need time to consult with common rooms and gather opinions.
- Sherman: Is the timeline challenging?

- SS: Hearing from the group, the agenda sharing needs to be earlier in term and extended deadlines for motions submission and amendments.
- AB: Which common rooms send non-president voting members?
- St John's and St Hilda's SU role not well engaged
- Keble JCR: We no longer have a SU Rep based on CCR structure.
- AB: Should we have SU reps attend here rather than Presidents?
- St Catz MCR: We need to better explain the SU, how it differs from Oxford Union to common room members. An SU Rep in common rooms may boost awareness.
- Keble JCR: When SU byelaws were written, common room presidents were decided as representative, if we want to change this it will require a big debate.
- Magdalen JCR: Consulting depends on how engaged student body is. Sometimes motion voting can be a simple executive gather rather than wider student body. On the question of President compared to a SU Rep, Presidents have broader oversight of common rooms/colleges and PresComs which make engagement with CCR more meaningful.
- AB: For clarification, comments on there not being enough time to consult on voting decision, do you think we need a longer voting period?
- Feedback generally suggested that we should not extend timelines too much as it may overextend motions and reduce time for actions.

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

12. AOB:

There were no additional items for discussion.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 3rd February (Week 3), 17:00-21:00, location (same): Lecture Theatre, H B Allen Centre.