

Council Minutes

1st Week Hilary Term 2016

1st Week Council took place at 5:30pm prompt, on Wednesday 20th January 2015, at St John's College, Garden Quad Reception Room.

We aim to make council as accessible as possible, and ensure that it is always in accessible venues. However, if there are any accessibility requirements that we are not meeting for yourself or others, please contact OUSU's Democratic Support Officer on 01865 611831, or at dso@ousu.ox.ac.uk.

If you have any questions about OUSU Council, please feel free to contact the Chair, Marina Lambrakis, at chair@ousu.ox.ac.uk.

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a. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

b. Matters Arising from the Minutes

1. Green Paper response (Appendix 1)

Nick Cooper (St John's) – Reported that the government put out a consultation about the future of higher education, and OUSU produced a response which was agreed to in 7th week council. Noted that this has been sent to all students twice and is available on the OUSU website if students wish to read it.

2. NSS Consultation response (Appendix 2)

Nick Cooper (St John's) – Reported that the NSS is completed by all final year undergraduates, and the consultation was filled in by OUSU on students' behalf. Noted that this is the version that came to council and is also still available online.

3. Student Written Submission (Appendices 3&4)

Nick Cooper (St John's) – Updated that this was finished and submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency prior to the Christmas break, and involved a long process of consultation. Explained that it is a long document that outlines things that we feel should change in the University to improve the academic experience.

c. Ratifications in Council

d. Elections in Council

Scrutiny Committee – Dan Mead (St John's), Brendon Casey (St Edmund's) and Joseph Small (Jesus) nominated.

Joe – Noted that scrutiny requires good communication and recognised that despite being a 1st year, he would have the ability to address people that are older and more senior than himself.

Dan – Informed council that he was on scrutiny last term, and recognised what it takes to be on the committee, and how important it is to hold officers to account. Noted that he can see improvements that can be made based on last term.

Brendon – Stated that if you can hold officers to account properly, it gives people faith in the system, as everyone knows what is going on, and if and when mandates are being fulfilled. Added that he is very good at communicating criticism in a way that is fair to everybody.

Alastair Graham (St John's) – Asked the candidates if they would be prepared to bring censure or no confidence motions to council if necessary.

Brendon – Answered that he would, as it is part of the job.

Dan – Answered that if someone has failed to do something, which they need to do within their role, then yes he would.

Joe – Replied that yes, and the willingness to do so is a vital part of the job.

Dan – 27

Brendon – 9

Joseph – 28

RON – 2

Dan Mead, Brendon Casey and Joseph Small were elected.

Mature Students' Officer – Dorkina Myrick (Mansfield) nominated.

Dorkina – Introduced herself to council, and informed that she is from Washington DC, and is here studying for a masters in public policy at the Blavatnik School. Informed council that she has twelve years of experience in government as a physician-scientist, in the US Senate, US House of Representatives, and the Brookings Institution. Stated that she would like to make the graduate mature student community more cohesive, provide support, especially for those who have spouses who are away or are having visa issues, and sponsor more activities with regard to topical challenges facing mature students.

Andrew Dwyer (Mansfield) – Asked why in the nominations form, Dorkina stated that she would be out of residence for eight weeks of term.

Dorkina – Replied that her course is a one-year programme set to finish in September, but that her graduation would not take place until November, and she did not have an exact date as of yet.

Dorkina – 62

RON – 0

Dorkina Myrick was elected.

Internal Affairs Committee – Sebastian Bates (Keble) nominated.

No hust requested.

Sebastian – 54

RON – 4

Sebastian Bates was elected.

e. Reports from and questions to the Sabbatical Officers, Executive Officers, Divisional Board Officers, Representatives of the OUSU Campaigns and RAG (*Raise and Give*)

Nick Cooper (St John's) – Informed council of University plans to raise the graduate application fee, which would be discussed in the emergency motion. Informed council that he would be entering rent negotiations with the University, and that he is yet to be given a number of the percentage increase that they are looking for. Flagged his planned review of taught masters programmes, as they vary considerably in quality. Flagged the International Festival, which would be happening as a part of the wider Oxford Students' Festival.

Becky Howe (Pembroke) – Informed council that one of her major pledges was to investigate welfare systems across the University, and updated that she and Ali had a survey ready to go over the next week, as the first step towards completing a welfare vision. Reported that she now has a rent and accommodation pack updated and nearly ready to go, and is planning rent training for JCR and MCR committees. Highlighted the Oxford Festival taking place on February 27th, celebrating the things that students get up to outside of their degrees. Informed council that they have been lobbying MPs on plans to abolish of maintenance grants, but

unfortunately the House of Commons voted in favour of the plans.

Emily Silcock (New) – Informed council that her Christmas Students matching scheme was very successful, with 20 students matched up with local families. Reported that she will be running an 8 week training course on campaigning this term, and highlighted the RAG charity ballot, urging students to nominate a charity if they would like RAG to raise money for a particular cause.

Cat Jones (Pembroke) – Informed council that the Alternative Prospectus now has over 130 submissions from students, and that the website will be launched on February 15th. Added that they will be sending 3000 fliers to schools that traditionally do not send students to Oxford. Asked for council's help with photos, as there is currently far too much architecture, and not enough student life. Flagged the National Student Satisfaction survey, and urged all final student undergraduates to fill it in, as it is a very useful tool for OUSU to see where the University is not delivering. Updated council that she has two big fights coming to the same meeting of Education Committee next week, on both prelims feedback and lecture recording.

Lucy Delaney (Wadham) – Updated council that she has a number of sessions of first responder training planned, and encouraged people to spread the word to welfare officers and womens' officers. Highlighted the vacancies for Womens' Campaign Officer and Graduate Womens' Officer, and urged women to run for these rewarding roles. Informed council that she has submitted guidelines for college deans, on how they can support us make consent workshops and race workshops to be structurally parts of freshers weeks, without prioritising one over the other.

Taisie (Wadham) – Asked if we should raise concerns that the NSS can be used against students, given the idea that positive feedback could be used as evidence for putting up fees in the future.

Cat – Recommended that students go ahead and promote it, but acknowledged that there has been a suggestion that in the future the NSS could be a part of the metric that is used for the Teaching Excellence Framework, which has been linked to fees. Stated that this is however a long way in the future, so should not affect the NSS yet.

Alastair Graham (St John's) – Asked Becky to remind those part time executive that have not reported that they have a duty to do so, and may receive a motion of censure if they do not.

f. Emergency motions

1. No rise to graduate application fee

Council Notes:

1. The university levies a fee of £60 to apply for most postgraduate degrees¹. This was increased from £50 only last year, among Council opposition (1st week, HT15).
2. Other UK and competitor international universities levy fees, but Oxford's is one of the highest – and is the highest in the UK (except for Masters courses at Imperial)².

¹ Exceptions: Said Business School charge more, and some degrees have fees waived (students on certain scholarships, PGCEs, and current Masters students applying to stay at Oxford for a research degree).

3. Some universities do not levy a fee, although this may reflect differences in their application systems³; some (especially in the US) offer fee waiver schemes.
4. The university's finances are very complicated but follow a basic principle: income is distributed based on who delivers the services, and central university administration is funded by recharging departments/colleges based on usage. Sort of.
5. All areas of the central university administration are facing budget difficulties, and they are required to find either cost savings or income increases.
6. As part of the current budget-setting process, the university are contemplating a further admissions fee rise. The justification is partly that previous fee rises have not affected application numbers (*overall*) and that (unless the budget allocations are changed) not doing so would mean making cuts to other student-facing services.
7. Information about applicants is limited, making it difficult to assess whether fee rises have disproportionately affected students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Council Believes:

1. Raising the application fee would damage graduate access, and discourage good students from applying here – particularly when they're also applying elsewhere.
2. It is not appropriate to balance the budget by charging applicants, the majority of whom will not even receive an offer to study here.
3. All areas of the university benefit from high-quality students, and that the university should reconsider its use of a financial model that forces the central administration to make detrimental decisions affecting access and student experience.

Council Resolves:

1. To reiterate its opposition to any rise in the graduate application fee, and its support for providing further fee waivers if this can be done fairly.
2. To mandate the Vice President (Graduates) to encourage Common Rooms to similarly highlight their opposition to such a move.

Proposed: Nick Cooper (St John's)

Seconded: Becky Howe (Pembroke)

Nick Cooper (St John's) – Explained that fees for graduate applications are currently £60, which is the second highest in the UK after UCL for taught masters. Noted that they were increased from £50 to £60 just last year. Informed council, that unlike last year, inflation does not account for the proposed new amount of £75. Recognised that this is a nuanced issue, as the University finances are very complicated, and the central administration relies on the divisions and departments giving money back to it, so have difficult decisions to make. Argued that in spite of this, this is a step too far, and will most likely affect current 1st and 2nd years who are likely to be

² As examples, in descending order of cost: Stanford c.£81, UCL £75 for Masters, but none for PhDs, a range of US universities charging £50-£60 (including Harvard, Yale, NYU, Caltech), Cambridge £50, Warwick £50 for Masters, none for PhDs. Imperial, Bristol and Edinburgh, among others, do not charge.

³ Some universities have administrative, rather than academic, staff making admissions decisions.

applying for graduate courses. Added that it is very bad for access at Oxford, as well as PR for the University, and really will put people off, and will put us at risk of losing very good potential candidates.

Andrew Dwyer (Mansfield) – Asked who Nick has spoken to about this at the University.

Nick – Answered that he has been in touch with a number of people within central administration, and is sympathetic to their difficult position.

Motion passed with no opposition.

g. Passage of motions without discussion

3. Selecting RAG charities

Council Notes:

1. For the past four years cross-campus ballots have taken place in order to choose the RAG charities.
2. The selection process of RAG charities is due to take place this term.
3. In the past, four charities are selected annually of which two of which are local and two national or international.
4. Nominations are open to all members of OUSU, as is voting.
5. Successful charities are supported from the start of the OUSU/RAG financial year in mid-August, until the next year's charities are supported the following summer.
6. A shortlist of these nominations is compiled by the RAG Executive Committee, under rules agreed by the committee in collaboration with OUSU's Returning Officer.
7. The current regulations have succeeded in encouraging many nominations for international charities but few for local or student-run charities.
8. Updated regulations (Appendix 5, Annexe A) for shortlisting RAG's charities have been agreed by RAG's Executive Committee.

Council believes:

1. That these changes to the regulations enable RAG to work with proactive and supportive charities whilst helping OUSU meet it's obligations to the local community and promoting student leadership.

Council Resolves:

1. To hold a cross campus ballot for the 2016-17 RAG charities using the Single Transferable Vote system.
2. To mandate the Returning Officer to administer the selection process and ballot on behalf of RAG, under Campaigning and Conduct Guidelines set out in Appendix 5, Annexe C.
3. To adopt the shortlisting criteria set out in Appendix 5, Annexe A.
4. To use the selection procedure set out in Appendix 5 Annexe B.
5. To mandate the RAG Executive to execute the shortlisting process set out in Appendix 5 Annex A.
6. To mandate the RAG Executive to adhere to the results of the cross campus ballot in selecting the 2016-17 charities.
7. To mandate the RAG Executive to publicise nominations and the ballot.

8. To mandate the VP (Charities & Community) to produce an annual report upon the conclusion of the RAG charity selection process, explaining why particular charities were or were not shortlisted

Proposed: Emily Silcock (New)

Seconded: Chris Williams (St John's)

Motion passed without discussion.

4. Complaints and appeals in the collegiate University

Council Notes:

1. That the Proctors' Office contains two Proctors and an Assessor, nominated by colleges and changing each year, and that the process is based on self-selection without necessarily requiring relevant experience.
2. The Proctors and Assessor, along with their Office, handle: student clubs & societies, exam regulations, sitting on many committees, disciplinary issues AND complaints & appeals.
3. That the Proctorial team can change mid-complaint for students.
4. That appeals against a complaint decision made by a Proctor are currently not possible. Under a proposed new system, appeals will be possible – but handled usually by the other Proctor.
5. That a review of the Proctors' Office is currently underway.
6. That – as previously noted by Council - college complaints and appeals processes vary greatly, and are not always transparent.

Council Believes:

1. That complaints and appeals should be handled fairly and transparently.
2. That the current combination of responsibilities in the Proctors' Office could affect student confidence in the fairness of decisions.
3. That complaints and appeals should not be handled by people who change annually, in the interests of efficiency and consistency.
4. That the current complaints/appeals system, including of appeals returning to the same office, is not always fair or transparent for the above reasons.
5. That some of the variable college policies are similarly unfair or lacking transparency, and are difficult for students to navigate.

Council Resolves:

1. To mandate the Sabbatical Officers to lobby for appeals to be reconsidered by an individual or body that is independent of the Proctors' Office.
2. To mandate Sabbatical Officers to lobby, in the longer term, for a reform of the current system to a model allowing greater continuity of decision-making, institutional memory, and a greater perception of fairness than an ever-changing team with numerous other responsibilities.
3. To mandate the Sabbatical Officers to lobby, and work with Common Rooms, to reduce the variation between college complaints and appeals processes and ensure that they are fair and transparent.
4. To make all of Council Believes and Resolves into Policy Guidelines.

Proposed: Cat Jones (Pembroke)

Seconded: Nick Cooper (St Johns)

Motion passed without discussion.

h. Motions of No Confidence or censure

i. Motions to amend Bye-Laws, General Regulations or Election Regulations

j. Motions authorising expenditure

2. Funding for making placards for the rally against cuts to homeless

Council Notes:

1. That Oxfordshire County Council is proposing a cut of 65% to the Housing Related Support budget.
2. That Homeless Voice Oxford (representing Oxford's homeless sector) has stated that the cuts will have "disastrous" consequences for homeless people and cause vital services to close.
3. That Oxfordshire County Council is holding a Full Cabinet meeting on Tuesday, January 26 to decide on cut allocations.
4. That Homeless Voice Oxford is organising the "Enough is Enough" rally outside the County Council building on Tuesday, January 26.
5. That the OUSU On Your Doorstep Campaign (OYD) is going to be cooperating with Aspire Oxford to make placards for the rally.

Council Believes:

1. That the Oxford University student body should stand up to protect services vital to some of the most vulnerable people in our city.
2. That making placards for the rally will enhance the efficacy of the protest.
3. That as an OUSU campaign, the OUSU council should support OYD in providing funding for materials necessary for making placards.

Council Resolves:

1. To contribute £200 to the making of placards for the "Enough is Enough" Rally.

Proposed: Jacob Vivian (Hertford)

Seconded: Emily Silcock (New)

Emily Silcock (New) – Informed students that the county council face government cuts of £70 million, which means that they will have to make cuts to a number of their services. Noted that they fund a lot of homeless services in Oxford, and in 2014 cut these by 38%, and are now proposing cutting them by an additional 65%. Stated that we will be joining in with the protest against this on the 26th January, but would like to be able to reimburse the homeless charities for the placards that we will be using at the protest.

Motion passed with no opposition.

k. Other motions

l. Any other business

1. Audited Accounts (Appendices 6&7)

Becky Howe (Pembroke) – Directed council to the audited accounts of OUSU that are now available online.

2. Review of Exec (Appendix 8)

Nick Cooper (St John's) – Explained to council that the sabbatical officers have been reviewing the composition of the executive, which is currently made up of the 6 sabbs and 21 part time executive officers. Noted that previous reports from the scrutiny committee repeatedly indicate that part time officers tend to find their roles a little unclear, a problem which is also true of the OUSU campaigns. Recognised that part of that problem is that a lot of exec roles and campaign roles have very similar names. Noted that part time exec roles are often unfilled or uncontested, which is something that we need to address. Reported that their proposal for a new executive would be made up of the 6 sabbatical officers, the chair/a co-chair, from each of the OUSU campaigns, and two common room presidents, one undergraduate and one graduate. Explained that the intent is to bring the campaigns into the heart of what OUSU is doing, and to strengthen them and have more people involved in their work, to remove the duplication of roles, giving sabbs more time to support each individual, and to reduce the divide between OUSU and common rooms. Directed to the infographic online which explains the proposal.

Cat Jones (Pembroke) – Informed council that through the proposed 'project incubator', OUSU will still be able to offer funding and support to students who come to OUSU with fresh new ideas. Recognised that some students want to do this, without also running in a cross-campus election and acting as a representative.

Lucy Delaney (Wadham) – Noted that we have referred to co-chairs throughout, meaning that it is up to campaigns themselves how they structure this. Explained that they would have a number of options, including physically splitting all of the campaign work equally between two representatives, or having one co-chair as a representative figure at executive meetings/council, while the other drives campaigns and organises events, meaning that while we are physically reducing roles, the idea is that we widen the scope and share out workload and achieve greater potential for the campaigns.

Danny Waldman (St John's) – Asked what the common room representatives would be doing.

Nick – Answered that for official purposes they are on the body, which oversees how policy is implemented in OUSU, and in practice it means they would be attending a couple of exec meetings per term.

Eden Bailey (Magdalen) – Asked what the various campaigns are at present.

Nick – Listed the campaigns: Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality (CRAE), LGBTQ Campaign, Womens' Campaign (WomCam), Oxford Students' Disability Community, International Students' Campaign, STUDENTSplus, Mind Your Head, Suspended Status Students Campaign, It Happens Here, Target Schools, Environment and Ethics Campaign, On Your Doorstep, Living Wage Campaign, and additionally Raise and Give (RAG). Acknowledged that some current executive roles would disappear because there isn't a campaign that matches them, however responses to this are indicated on the document.

Jacob Williams (Exeter) – Asked how campaign chairs are currently chosen, and in light of these changes, how that would be affected.

Nick – Replied that the campaign chairs are currently chosen within campaign meetings, which the sabbs consider important to retain, however those meetings and elections would need to be opened out, with a provision that they must be advertised in advance, with some specification of how that would have to happen. Noted that anyone is welcome to attend campaign meetings, with the exception of the four liberation campaigns, which is restricted to those who identify within those groups.

Jacob Page (St Cross) – Asked how new ad hoc positions be created under this system.

Nick – Replied that the way of creating a campaign would remain as it currently is, where council has to agree, and a sabbatical officer must sponsor it, however noted that we do not want to lose the benefit of sabbs being able to give greater levels of support to those in their remit, so would hope that the number would not increase too much above what it currently is.

Cat – Added that this is the key difference between campaign with a capital ‘c’ and campaign with a small ‘c’, explaining that the capital ‘c’ campaigns represent a group of students or a long term issue, and sit on the executive, but small ‘c’ campaigns, where we spot a problem and fix it, could be run through the project incubator.

Andrew Dwyer (Mansfield) – Asked if graduate influence is likely to be diluted in this new system.

Nick – Recognised that this is a problem in the system, but explained that it is important to get graduate and undergraduate involvement in every level of what we are doing, rather than having roles that are specifically for graduates and all other roles dominated by undergraduates. Added that all campaigns will have to have a minimum of one graduate.

Eden Tanner (St John’s) – Stated that she thought that the sabbs had done an excellent job, but raised a few concerns with the proposed system, including the lack of a student parents and carers officer, the loss of the clubs and societies officer, especially as strategically this is something that OUSU is moving towards, and the imbalance across sabbs and how many campaigns they each look after.

Becky Howe (Pembroke) – Agreed that parents and carers is a concern that needs more thought. Confirmed that OUSU does want to move towards clubs and societies, but hoped that a staff member would be able to lead the way on this alongside the president. Agreed that she would be very happy to look at the distribution of campaigns amongst sabbs.

Tom Wadsworth (St John’s) – Asked why campaigns must send a co-chair rather than a representative to the Executive meetings. Added that there is very little hierarchy within OSDC, and picking a co-chair within the campaign would reinforce one.

Becky – Answered that the choice of the phrase co-chair is simply because most campaigns have this system, however noted that this is just a consultation, and she sees no issue with sending a nominee of the campaign as the executive member.