

MCR Termly General Meeting (Minutes). 6pm, Memorial Room, 8th November.

Present: Harry, Guillaume, Eleri, Joe, Charlie, Iris, Nicole, Ellya, Hamza, Tim, Miles, Sarah, David, Joely, Drew, Andre, Dan N, Ed, Kathryn, Julia, Dan I-W, Sachintha

President's Report of College Committees.

Tim: I've been sitting on numerous college committees. No significant changes. Going to be a ramp built outside St Aldates; will make things a bit more disabled friendly. Bigger plans for the Aldate's refurb in later years. Florey refurb has been shelved because it's costing too much money. Library opening has been pushed back; when the books are being moved, outside of term, there will be suitable arrangements for graduates to study in college.

Outside of college committees, we have the largest membership of recent years: many associate/honorary members.

[Lights flicker.]

Tim: This place really is haunted.

Treasurer's Budget Report.

Miles: In terms of FW spending, we basically broke even; about £700 left over to pay Magdalen College Boathouse for the summer punting scheme last year. We currently haven't received our money from college for this term; college is being slow. I'll send something around to the mailing list / to Dan for the website so we can all see where the money's going.

Other thing. Tim and I drafted a budget, about £4000 worth, but probably we'll get a bit more because of the higher membership.

Constitutional Motions.

Tim: Not really appropriate for me to chair because all of the motions are mine. Miles will chair.

Miles: Quorum is 20% of the MCR voting student body; this comes to 58 members. We don't have 58 members here, so all the constitutional motions will go to an online vote. Will be sent out two days after this meeting so minutes / amendments to the motions can be sent around.

1. Sexual Consent Workshops.

Miles: Want to echo what Matilde said last year: be respectful and keep to calm discussion.

Tim: We ran consent workshops this year for the incoming freshers; they were well received. I think we should continue this on; this is supported by college (e.g. governing body). Easiest way to make sure that they keep being run is to put it in the constitution, like the newspaper ballot which happens every year. I recommend that the workshops be run pretty closely on OUSU guidelines. We elided a

section on statistics because we felt that they were unhelpful, although they were discussed in some workshops. Not trying to hide them.

Eleri: Need to amend the motion to define 'compulsory'.

Tim: What we said this year was that it's compulsory to all incoming grads to Queen's, so that 4th years don't have to do them.

Sarah: What is the exact wording of the changed motions?

Tim: "compulsory for all incoming graduates"

Eleri: Also means that if you don't go, you can't go to

Tim: "compulsory for incoming graduates to attend MCR events"

Charlie: Would there be follow-up sessions?

Tim / Nicole: Yes, we had them in 1st week this time around.

Miles: As we don't have quorum, this will go to an online vote.

2. Disabled Students' Officer.

Tim: College is trying to make the building more disabled-friendly. I would really like the MCR to be consulted about these decisions, as often the graduate facilities in Queen's are the ones that are difficult to access. I've had difficulties getting people to take the role, but I had two people who said they were happy to do it but couldn't because they don't self-identify as disabled. The self-definition is important for welfare reasons, but it is important to have a disabled officer.

Andre: Do we have a disabled officer at the moment?

Tim: No.

Julia: The role is meant to automatically be taken over by another member of the committee when the role is unfilled; make sure that happens. I'm not sure that taking out the self-identifying aspect would mean that people would come forward.

Tim: I felt that it fell to me to fill the role so I've been attending equalities meetings. The Aldate's alteration happened without the MCR being consulted; a lot of ad hoc meetings get held. I want to make sure that we have representatives on these committees. I appreciate what you're saying, that the line is there for a reason.

Julia: I don't think I'm disagreeing; offering suggestions for it to be better defined. Could a student who doesn't self-define as disabled but is interested, then they could be co-opted.

Tim: People who are co-opted don't get a vote on the committee, while the Disabled Students' Officer does.

Dan N: Should we give preference to people who self-define as disabled and then open the role to everyone else?

Harry: Isn't that the current arrangement?

Dan N: You currently can't be the Disabled Students' Officer if you don't self-define.

Andre: Maybe open the role after MT 4th week to other people.

Hamza: Any restrictions on who can vote?

Tim: No, anyone in the MCR.

Eleri: An issue with asking people to self-define is people don't want to describe themselves as disabled. Might be more welcoming to just have it open to everyone.

Tim: My hope would be that if the role was contested, then the MCR would vote for the person who would fulfil the role the best.

Eleri: We don't want people to have to prove themselves.

Miles: Happy for the motion to be unamended?

[General silence.]

Sarah: Sounds like yes.

Miles: This will go to an online vote.

3. MCR Members Living Abroad.

Miles: Past meetings have indicated that people don't like their names being on the minutes unexpectedly; try not to mention names. Sarah, don't write them down.

Sarah: Yes boss.

Tim: I feel that the subscription / membership of the MCR is pretty high. I'd like to try to reduce this as much as possible without reducing the overall figure, because the moment you start asking college for less money you're in trouble. We've introduced e.g. the cinema scheme so that MCR members can get money back from us. This is about MCR members who live abroad who don't use the MCR / can't attend social events because they're physically not in Oxford. The request to be considered for the subscription fee waiver would be submitted by email with some kind of evidence (that would be easy to supply), which would then be passed by the Tutor for Graduates. The deadline would be Monday of -1st week so that we don't have people deciding at the end of MT that they don't use the MCR and don't want to pay.

Harry: Do we have any kind of ballpark figures for what kind of budget fluctuations we might get? How much money we might lose?

Tim: Happening this term for four MCR members; we don't know if there are more out there who haven't thought to ask. I've had emails about this proposal from people living away from Oxford, so there may well be more. I don't anticipate more than 10 / 15. If it becomes more, then it wouldn't be feasible.

Kathryn: Would this also apply for those who are out of the MCR for a term for e.g. long term illness?

Tim: Their student membership would be suspended so they wouldn't be charged anyway.

Ellya: How is this not shooting ourselves in the foot in college's eyes?

Tim: This isn't quite as bad. It's not like we're taking a little bit off everyone's battels.

Julia: Does it have to be renewed every term?

Tim: If you know you're away for a year, you could request a year.

Guillaume: Clarification. If someone's doing a project away from Oxford in e.g. Newcastle, does that count as 'living abroad'?

Tim: Newcastle is up north.

Sarah: Rude.

Guillaume: They're not using the college even if they're still in the country.

Andre: There would have to be a minimum time.

Tim: By 'living abroad' I really mean 'not living in Oxford'. I don't want it to include someone who's living in e.g. Abingdon and chooses not to use the MCR for personal reasons. Amend it to 'someone living abroad or working at another institution'.

Harry: If you can give reasonable evidence that you can't use the facilities, that's legit. It's implicit in the working.

Charlie: Even students who are at the university can choose not to pay subs.

Tim: That is an option.

Miles: The amendment. "living abroad or studying at another institution".

Miles: This will go to an online vote.

Regular Motions.

1. NUS Demonstration Against the Higher Education Bill.

Joe: Where's the pizza?

Julia: The motion is pledging to donate £75 to OUSU to help with the cost of taking Oxford University students to London to join the National Union of Students to demonstrate against the higher education bill, which includes increasing fees for domestic students to £9000+, the Office for Students which includes no student representatives, and the Teaching Excellence framework. Oxford will be raising fees for new students next year to £9000+ student. OUSU don't have a budget for funding these coaches, but they've pledged £300. Students who are attending will be charged £3. After all of that, colleges who have pledged to donate will be charged; we may not actually be charged (we weren't last year).

Kathryn: Where does the £75 figure come from?

Julia: It's a suggested figure from OUSU. Between £25 - £100. The amount could be adjusted.

Kathryn: What did we pledge last year?

Julia: £75.

Dan I-W: I THINK IT'S A GREAT MOTION. Higher education is under attack. Students are living in poverty, raising fees is reducing access, the Teaching Excellence thing is a commodification of education. "totally idiotic ideologically-driven policy". I'm sure many of us benefitted from grants and lower tuition fees. I think we should be fighting to allow others to benefit like we did.

Harry: The Higher Education Bill is going to upset students. Two buses are going to shock and appal no one in government.

Dan I-W: If the objection is that protesting doesn't work, then that's wrong.

Julia: Students have been protesting in Oxford about tuition fees increasing and have won. Protest is an effective form of agitation, especially with regards this bill. It's not just students that are protesting. It's unions, it's lecturers, it's teachers. As a future academic, I think that the Teaching Excellence framework is a joke. Allowing students to safely attend the demonstration is a good thing.

Guillaume: It's a good cause. However, I'm worried about the precedent that this creates: many people could apply for lots of funding for lots of different protests. This one is acceptable, because it's about education. If the protest weren't about education, then it wouldn't be acceptable.

Tim: We don't actually have that much money. We have to be careful about how we spend our money. Is this the best use of that £75? We could do a lot of things with that money, e.g. create a fund for Summer Dinner that people could apply to to subsidise the cost of the meal, to create an MCR book grant, some way to request money for attending conferences. This is how the MCR should be looking to make higher education affordable for its members.

Dan I-W: Changes in education largely happens at a national level; policy is decided in Westminster. It's the collective challenge of all students across the country that makes a difference. £75 isn't that much – so it won't change a huge amount for the protest, either, but the way to solve the problems in higher education is collective struggle, working together as a student body, showing solidarity, helping make it happen. Change doesn't happen through a slightly better book grant at an already-wealthy college. We're fighting for more than just ourselves.

Andre: £9000 is already ridiculously high; it should go back down to £3000. Let's convince all the incoming students to strike!

[General chat about tuition fees and Theresa May.]

Andre: "We should just move to Mars and create a new utopian society."

Hamza: Is there a precedent set in the constitution about the remit of the MCR?

Julia: I don't know that it does, but the way that it works is that you can't just propose things like this and get them through without discussion. These things have to be brought to committee / general meetings so that people can voice concerns. Students get the motions in advance, so people can show up and object about things if they feel strongly. I'd feel uncomfortable with a constitution outlining specifically what we can and cannot do, politically speaking.

Tim: I stood for President on the basis of fostering a social and academic community in the MCR. I would always resist any form of politicisation outside of an academic purpose. A lot of this comes from my background at Imperial, where you have to sign something saying that you won't protest, because the university is founded on a non-political basis.

Miles: I've been asked to consider the possibility of a blind vote. There is no precedent for this, bar the fact that the people attending the meeting can overturn or alter any standing order in the constitution. This would require a 2/3 majority of those present to agree to a blind vote before we take the vote. Vote on whether to take a blind vote?

Tim: It was me! I proposed this! Putting your hand up in front of someone can be intimidating. I want all votes to be done this way.

Guillaume: I support that. At JCR meetings, for some motions they do have a blind vote. It's a good idea.

Dan I-W: I think people should be held accountable for their views. This is a classic move of people defending their self-interest. There's always going to be friction.

Iris: When we vote online, it's blind.

Dan I-W: Sure, but it doesn't need to be here.

Guillaume: What are we voting for?

Sarah: Whether or not to have a blind vote this specific time.

Miles: 19 people here; we need 13 people to agree to this.

For: 10

Against: 5

Abstain: 4

Miles: So no blind vote! The actual vote for this motion.

For: 16

Against: 3

Abstain: 2

Motion passes.

Miles: Julia, tell me what I have to do.

Julia: Talk to your OUSU representative!

Miles: Dan, tell me what I have to do.

[General amusement.]