

RCSA Open Meeting Minutes
7.30pm, 4 May 2008, Easter Term
JCR

Tom Kelly as the chairperson & Becky Yeoh minuting

1. Apologies for absence or lateness

Barnaby Mollett sent his apologies.

2. Announcement of the presence and purpose of guests

There were no guests.

3. Approval of the order of the agenda

Luke Snell (LS) asked to move motion d to start of Ordinary Motions. There were no objections.

4. Reading by the secretary on request by any Member, amendment if necessary and approval of the Minutes of any previous Open Meeting not yet accepted by an Open Meeting.

There were no amendments

5. Matters Arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

6. Reports from the Committee

There were no reports from the committee

7. Questions to the committee

There were no questions to the committee

8. Extraordinary motions

There were no extraordinary motions

9. Ordinary motions

d) Publication of Rent Levels

LS said new students don't find out about rents in Robinson until it's too late, after they've accepted their offer. Students should know how much they will be paying before they come. RCSA can solve this problem by making the rents available to be viewed on the RCSA website.

For: 31

Against: 0

Abstention: 1

Motion d) was duly passed.

a) Fair Trade Bar

Peter Wood (PW) said that 128 people when surveyed said that they would like to see more Fair Trade certified products for sale. Fair Trade is a certification. Bar and canteen have agreed to sell Fair Trade items as long as the student body set it up. £200 would be needed by Fair Trade society which would be given to the bar to get wine, which would then be given back to them when it was sold. £200 was necessary to get better deals and would make it unnecessary to bring it to the OM every week.

Lucas Fear-Segal (LFS) said that the bar probably knows more about selling drinks than people do. People have not agreed that Fair Trade is positive- PW told us that it is. He also said that purpose of Fair Trade society should be to raise the money themselves. He also said that

Brandon Green (BG) (POI) said that RCSA has policy to support Fair Trade initiatives

Tom Kelly (TK) said that didn't bind anyone to vote for this financial allocation.

Chris Thislethwaite (CT) asked what would happen to the £200 eventually.

PW said that by the time the bar was in a position to give money back, the money would go back to the RCSA.

BG asked where it would be stored

PW said that it would be stored in the RCSA room and people would not be able to steal it

Ben Henriques (BH) said that while a survey may or may not reflect the true views of people but that cannot be merely guessed on. Fair Trade would benefit all members of college and should be voted in favour of

Lewis Hemens (LH) asked if wine isn't stored in the bar, how would one get their wine?

PW said that there would be a night's worth of wine stored in the bar

Dave Bewicke (DB) asked where the money was coming from

PW said that they money would come from the reserves but the budget would not be modified

BG asked why the bar was unwilling to store the wine

PW said that they don't think that the amount of wine being bought will be that high so they don't want to use up their storage area when it can be stored elsewhere. No one will make a profit but the wine will be available.

LH (speech against) said that he had seen the survey taking place and he had reservations about how rigorous it was.

Emma Irving (EI) said that they did the best they could given how unwilling people are to talk about it

CT said that no matter how little wine was bought the RCSA would not lose money

Rebecca Yeoh (RY) asked why we want Fair Trade Status

PW said that the RCSA voted that they supported it after he explained it at an OM. Fair Trade status exists which is where the foundation recognises that we support Fair Trade to a certain extent.

Iain Barr asked if PW could guarantee not asking for anymore money at the budget meeting given that he was being given a one off loan

PW said that he wouldn't like to make a commitment but currently he had no plans to ask for more money and if they needed more they would bring it up and it would have to be weighed against other requests.

For: 30

Against: 5

Abstention: 4

Motion a) was duly passed

b) Tennis Budget Reallocation

Stewart Walker (SW) said he didn't realise that there were cuppers fee so he needs to move over the equipment money to pay for it. He said he's not asking for anymore money, just moving it over.

For: 39

Against: 1

Abstention: 0

Motion b) was duly passed

c) Fourth Year Rents

Michael Albert Brown (MAB) said that fourth year returning linguists would be required to pay the same as incoming first years. Given that their year abroad would be an expensive year, it seems slightly unfair. Also, it would deter future applicants from coming to Robinson. As a matter of principle they shouldn't be allowed to get away with it.

Dal Channa (DC) said that they don't get very much money for the year abroad so anything above that they actually have to pay themselves

IB asked where he got the information from

MAB said he got it from a notice on the RCSA notice board that listed the rents. The point is that they shouldn't have to pay more because the principle of the rent system is that our rent is fixed.

BH said that comparisons to other colleges should be used

Claire Horrocks (CH) said that confirmation of rents needs to be sought because college hasn't given any kind of firm figures so it's difficult to bring anything up against them.

TK said that his understanding was that fourth years pay the same as the second years, not the incoming freshers.

MAB said nevertheless it would still go up a few hundred pounds

Charlotte Crook (CC) said that they would be paying more than Freshers would be paying as they don't get their one year of "fixed rent"

BG said that the wording of the motion should be changed to include all people in the fourth year

MAB said that it was an oversight, not done intentionally

Claire Metcalfe (CM) said that the difference between that is that the engineers in fourth year would have had their one year of fixed rent, which was not the case for linguists.

Hannah Poppy (HP) said that they have to pay fees to the university even for their year abroad

TK said that this is an issue that affects MML and FAMES students across the university and a motion was coming to CUSU council on it later in the week.

IB said that he had been speaking to Liz Guild, who has it fixed in her mind that what we pay is the upper part of the average band, but she won't exactly explain what that means. He said that everyone should vote for it because students should know what they're paying for

LS said that we've been talking about rents for a long time and a more aggressive approach was due.

BG said that after three years, everyone should pay what the current second years are paying.

CT asked for an amendment that to RCSA resolves, stating rents should be changed to make it the same as third year rent rather than completely revoking it.

MAB accepted the amendment

For: 37

Against: 0

Abstention: 0

Motion c) was duly passed

e) Politics Society

LFS said that he would like to set up a politics society to discuss politics

BG asked if the RCSA wasn't already a political society

LFS said that this society would be more of a spectator society than an active one

BH said there are already other societies and asked how he planned on competing

LFS said that he would compete by getting better speakers, and that there were always other societies but each college society offers something different.

Daniel Tse (DT) asked if LFS had any budget at hand for the society

LFS said that he might charge a nominal fee for people to see the speakers

DT said that it seemed strange and ambiguous to set up a society without a budget

LFS said that other societies had been set up without a budget

IB said that a society shouldn't be prevented from being set up based on budget needs- that should be left to the budget meeting.

BG asked if he had done a survey

LFS said yes but it was in his room

For: 27

Against: 0

Abstention: 2

Motion e) was duly passed

f) HE Funding/Tuition Fees

CH chaired the meeting for this motion.

TK said that CUSU's current policy was against fees. The proposed CUSU motion, in the addendum, argued it was no longer pragmatic to support that, but that the £3000 cap should be kept and education should be free at point of entry.

BH said that the reason certain people object to the CUSU motion is that they believe that the focus should be on abolishing fees altogether

TK outlined the two potential written amendments to the main motion.

Amendment 1: Strongly anti fees and that there should be progressive taxes to pay for it, education should be free for all EU and internationals as well.

Amendment 2: Keep policy against fees, don't involve NUS, best way to hold the cap would be to be against fees in the first place.

BG said that it was ridiculous for internationals to be educated at no cost

LFS said that while he agrees with BG's point but he agrees with the main point of 1. The problem with a cap is that it will always be raised and that 1 would go further in slowing down the raising of the cap and that on principle, education should be free. While we may not get that, fighting for it would probably result in us getting a better deal anyway.

BH said that the motion as it stands does not abandon anti fees policy, it's just a question of where the emphasis is

LFS said that that's irrelevant as by voting to keep a cap, they were effectively not supporting making education free. We should not lower our demand because of government policy.

TK said that it would be misleading to say that this motion, if passed, would not amount to CUSU's approach being perceived as less hard line than it is at the moment

BG asked if we shouldn't be looking for fees-ability

LFS said if you support the cap you are not supporting an anti fees policy

DT said that we should focus on the cap rather than free education as it will not happen in the real world. The government has made a promise to raise university fees every year anyway, it's not about free education.

John Tweed asked how an increase in fees would be offset by increases in bursaries

TK said that correspondingly universities would be required to put more money in to make up for the increased fees. Other universities say it's unfair because Oxbridge have such a big endowment. The fees are index linked so they keep going up by about 70 quid

a year. The lifting of the cap could result in the fees rising to £6000 (the Vice-Chancellor's suggestion).

BG suggested that this was a debate for the politics society.

RY said that free higher education is not an objective right - higher education hasn't been proved to be a public good, there is plenty of private benefit, people should pay for it.

TK said that the main thrust of the motion was against raising the cap, he summarised the amendments and indicative votes established the most support was for the main motion.

BH said that the main motion was to make sure that the cap isn't lifted

TK restated the purpose of the motion and that IB and TK would now vote in favour of the policy at CUSU.

For: 24

Against: 0

Abstention: 1

Motion f) was duly passed

TK resumed the chair.

g) CCTV cameras

MAB said that having spoken to the porters, there are 16 new CCTV cameras around the college, which is in fact the main motive of redeveloping the porters lodge to accommodate surveillance. It's worrying that we have no idea what these feeds are for, where they come from, and what they're used for.

IB said that this is probably useful for students to know. Proposed an amendment to the "resolves"- RCSA resolves to provide information on website.

MAB accepted amendment

Chris Oates (CO) said that the information should not be made available to public- not great for safety

CT said that we should make sure that none of the cameras could see into people's rooms

BG said that he was greeted by Gary the porter after a night out and was congratulated on a good night- it was then that he found out that there's a camera outside 2 Adams, so it's a real problem.

MAB said that in Oxford people were prosecuted in court based on photographs of after exam celebrations. It's important that we stick up for the privacy of people in college.

CO said that it's also important to point out where the cameras are as well as who has access to them

BH said that it was unlikely that anyone other than the Porters would have access to the cameras.

CH said that the feeds should be destroyed so that they can't be used for future prosecution

LFS said that we should move to get all feed destroyed

IB said that we should get more information on the cameras before we start objecting to anything about them

For: 26

Against: 0

Abstention: 0

Motion g) was duly passed

h) Croquet Financial Request

BG said that Robinson is one of the few colleges with a Croquet society. The equipment is in terrible condition and they need new stuff- the equipment lasts a long time and does not need to be replaced often. It's available for all students to use, not just a specific society. This money would come from the reserves rather than the main budget.

TK said that it comes from the OM budget

Fiona Wright (FW) asked if had asked for money from the budget

BG said no, he hadn't ever asked for money for mallets at the budget meeting

LFS said that as a member of the croquet society, 100 quid isn't really enough.

BG said that he is only buying two mallets

BG amended the motion to mallet(s)

For: 21

Against: 2

Abstention: 1

Motion g) was duly passed

i) RCSA punt

LFS said lots of colleges have their own punts even if they're not on the banks. As members of the university, we should have access to cheap punts too rather than having to pay tourist prices. John's punting society sells an old punt every year for 5-700 pounds (new: 2000 pounds). He said that he would like to mandate an RCSA officer to obtain a punt for Robinson students to use.

CT said that RCSA has just spent 140 quid to get a reduction on Skudamore's prices- half price is a significant discount. So it's untrue we pay tourist prices. One punt is not useful for college.

DB asked if it would be feasible to keep it in bin brook.

Jim Arnold (JA) said that maintenance and insurance had not been factored in so it would cost more than 500-700 pounds.

LH asked how much discount Skudamore's gives us

CT said that we pay just over half price

PW asked how much we pay to get this discount

CT said about 140 quid which saves the students money

PW asked if we couldn't give more money to skudamores and get a bigger discount

CT said it was standardised

EI said that since you go with many people when you punt, it rarely cost more than 2 quid each.

MAB said that it was a brilliant idea and he was wondering if the Jimmy Bell wouldn't be a good name for the society

LFS said that the proposal was to look into buying a punt, not actually buying one. And with regards to people going in big groups- the buying of this punt would allow people the option of going as a couple. Maintenance shouldn't be too expensive and boat insurance is rarely more than 20-30 quid a year

CH said that if we stop paying skudamores, we will only have one punt, and frequently people use more than one punt at a time.

BG said that these other colleges like Johns and Magdalene were on the river- they built on their strengths. He mentioned the pheasants and said we should amend motion to a canoe, more relevant to Robinson's strengths.

TK said that amendment was not acceptable as it was beyond the spirit of the motion.

PW said that the point of RCSA is to represent the student body, and the person proposing the motion should fully investigate it themselves rather than mandating the RCSA to do it.

DB said that any motion is entitled to mandate any officer to do whatever they want them to.

LFS said that we should look into it.

For: 6
Against: 18
Abstention: 2

Motion i) duly failed.

j) Rollover Open Meeting Funds

IB moved a procedural motion to adjourn motion j to the next meeting

This procedural motion carried.

10. Any Other RCSA Business

i) RCSA website

LH said that he had redone the website and he was looking for suggestions and designs because he is not very creative.

BG suggested that we add a social networking feature to the site

LH said that there were some plans for that, but perhaps not quite that complex.

ii) CUSU no platform policy

TK briefly outlined the purpose of the policy (it was not printed on the agenda). The policy attempts to restrict and oppose those with prejudiced and 'hatemongering' or 'dissident' views. The policy is lapsing so CUSU has to do something about it. NPP had caused some objection in CUSU during Lent 2008 when an attempt had been made to add an additional group.

BH said that violent, racist and homophobic people, according to this policy, should not be allowed to speak.

IB said that both he and TK have opinions on it but it is their job to represent the student body.

JA said that everyone in the college was bright and able to hear opinions and didn't need CUSU nannyng them.

BH said he is against the no platform policy as he is not convinced that there isn't really a link between increased violence and hatred and giving such people platforms

EI said that if violence increases it's a legal matter rather than one of free speech

BH said that one argument against is that the speeches are targeted at the townspeople rather than students

IB said that another point again is not just about how it would sway people, but about how it would upset those that the speeches were prejudiced against. Students get quite hurt if someone directly opposes their way of life.

MAB said that there is honestly nothing going on in the CUSU executive and they have no power.

TK said that there are legal issues that might stop them doing anything anyway

CH asked how it would be determined who would be given platform and who wouldn't. LFS said that there are ideas where we can draw distinct lines over some issues. This motion would not place a gag on these people- it's merely saying that we do not agree with the hateful things that they espouse.

BG said that certain groups were missed out. We should put Nazis on the list, Harikrishna is annoying so they should be put on that too.

TK said that his personal opinion is closer to LFS'. No platform policies are problematic, but certain group's views are just disgusting and CUSU does have a role to play to say they're not welcome here.

RM asked if they can't just come to the union, which isn't under CUSU's jurisdiction.

IB said that his opinion was much closer to Jim's so he would probably vote differently from TK, so there could be one vote from each.

BH said that given that there are people here listening to this, people are interested in it. Could we circulate an email about it so that more people can give their opinions?

TK said he intended to do this. He asked for an indicative vote on the No Platform Policy:

For: 1/3

Against: 2/3

T. Kelly