

RCSA Open Meeting Minutes

Sunday 30th December 2010, 5pm, JCR

1. Apologies for absence or lateness

Apologies from Steven Gordon (SG), Sam Harrison (SH). Kai-Man Cheung (KMC) and Ewan McGregor were late.

2. Announcement of the presence and purpose of guests

There were no guests.

3. Approval of the presence and speaking rights of guests

There were no guests.

4. Approval of the order of the agenda

The order of the agenda was approved.

5. 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.

The minutes of the previous open meeting were approved.

6. Matters Arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

7. Reports from the Committee

Rosalyn Old (RO) presented previous president of the RCSA Duncan Stibbard Hawkes (DSH) with a present on behalf of the new committee as a thank you for his hard work last year. The present was a tyrannosaurus rex dressed as a Pegasus. DSH was giggly, high-pitched and generally overwhelmed and said all that of the work had been worth it. Rob Beagrie (not present) was gifted a chair with a Robinson pegasus on it.

8. Questions to the Committee

Tobias Paul (TP) asked if Chris Halcrow (CH) can confirm if there are enough rooms to choose from in the room ballot this year. CH said that he could not confirm the number as he is yet to meet with college, but enough should be available.

9. Extraordinary Motions

There were no extraordinary motions

10. Ordinary Motions

a) Creation of Association Sub-committee

RCSA notes:

1. the report of the Executive Officers entitled 'CUSU Affiliation: An RCSA Report'; in particular
2. section VI subsection e) of the aforementioned report, concerning perceived constitutional difficulties in the event of disaffiliation from the Cambridge University Students' Union ('CUSU').

RCSA believes:

1. that the opinion of the Executive Officers, that the problem identified would require constitutional amendment, is correct;
2. constitutional development does not have to be a reactive process;
3. that effective and considered amendment of the Constitution can best be achieved through detailed, unhurried investigation and consultation; and
4. that it is desirable for the issue identified in the report (supra) to be resolved in strict isolation from any motion, referendum or discussion of the real or perceived benefits and disbenefits of affiliation to or disaffiliation from the CUSU.

RCSA resolves:

1. to establish forthwith a sub-committee pursuant to Article 54(b) of the Constitution, to be known in all correspondence and within any record as the 'Lent 2011 Standing Committee' (the 'Committee') or by such other name as its membership may determine to be expedient and appropriate;
2. to authorise the Committee to investigate the issues and documents stipulated in - and in accord with - the Terms of Reference (appendix 1 of this motion);
3. to instruct the Committee to publish such proposals, if any, that it should deem requisite for the resolution of the problem referred to in Note 2 (supra) before the third open meeting of the Association held within Lent Full Term, after which point it shall be dissolved; and
4. to mandate the Association's Chairman to appoint the membership of the Committee in accordance with the Articles of Establishment (appendix 2 of this motion) and to oversee its activities with a view to ensuring that such comply with the regulations and guidance therein contained.

Proposed: Paul Galaway

Seconded: Tobias Paul

TP said that it is an issue that the RCSA constitution makes disaffiliating from CUSU problematic for some members of the RCSA. TP suggested forming a sub-committee to amend references to in the constitution so that there is not a constitutional problem in re-affiliation.

Dan Green (DG) said that the simple and obvious solution is to add the phrase 'when the RCSA is affiliated to CUSU' after any CUSU-based constitutional obligation. A subcommittee to do this would be over-kill.

Michael Boyle (MB) asked if this motion would make it easier for the college to disaffiliate. EM said that it would. MB said that he prefers the constitution the way it is, to stop the college disaffiliating from CUSU willy-nilly.

RO said that this would be a sensible thing to do if it needed to be addressed by the RCSA right now, but the motion really only needs to be done if Robinson disaffiliates, so the amendments should only be carried out if Robinson decides to disaffiliate.

CH pointed out that there would be a constitutional review in 2012, and so the motion could be an amendment made then along with other reforms, rather than now. DSH recommended that the current RCSA send a note to the new committee suggesting the amendment.

RO said that there are various things in the constitution that should be changed, and that it would be unfair to devote time to this one reform before the full constitutional reform. All the changes should be made together.

TB said that wider reform would not be due until many of the current members of the RCSA had graduated. The suggested reform is a specific issue that has already been identified. The problem with the truncated reforms committee last year was that it tried to do too much. It is still a possibility we could disaffiliate this year. It would be in the RCSA's interest to remove constitutional difficulty. It would not make it easier to disaffiliate or re-affiliate, just remove the anomaly.

EM invited the meeting to vote on motion a).

For: 1

Against: 8

Abstain: 15

Motion a) falls.

b) Asylum Seeker Support

RCSA notes:

1. An asylum seeker is someone who has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.
2. Asylum seekers are in the UK seeking protection and may wait months or even years for their application to be processed.
3. Article 26 of the UDHR which states "Everyone has the right to education... and higher education shall be equally accessible to all..."
4. That at Cambridge University, asylum seekers are classed as international students and for a typical undergraduate degree at Cambridge have to pay between £10, 752 to £14,073 pounds per annum fees instead of the "home fee" rate of £3,290.
5. That asylum seekers cannot afford these fees (or living costs) because they are neither allowed to apply for student loans nor work in the UK and that asylum seekers are unable to apply for a bursary from

Cambridge University.

7. Cambridge Student Action for Refugee's campaign for equal access to university for asylum seekers.
8. NUS policy in support of STAR's campaign to guarantee equal access for asylum seekers in UK Higher Education (2008).
9. The success of STAR's campaign in Manchester, London Met, Liverpool, Manchester Met, Middlesex and Edgehill universities, which now offer home-rate tuition fees to asylum seekers.

RCSA believes:

1. That everyone ought to have an equal opportunity to education.
2. That no-one should have to put their entire life on hold for years unable to get an education.
3. That the current funding system, both nationally and within Cambridge University, is unfairly punitive towards asylum seekers.
4. That Cambridge University should take a leading role in this national Campaign.

RCSA resolves:

1. To pledge support to STAR's campaign.
2. To mandate The JCR President and External Officer to vote in favour of this motion at CUSU council, with view to lobby Vice-Chancellor and pro Vice-Chancellors to:
 - a) Offer degrees at 'home rate' prices to Asylum Seekers. (This would essentially require the university to subsidise degrees for Asylum Seekers, to make up for the gap in government funding.)
 - b) To make the Cambridge Bursary available to Asylum Seekers.
 - c) To pledge Cambridge University's support and campaign for a change in government policy that will give Asylum Seekers equal rights to government funding.

Proposed: Alex Walmsley

Seconded: Arun Niranjana

Alex Walmsley (AW) said that asylum seekers were classed as overseas students when in higher education, even if they have lived in the UK for several years. They are not eligible for financial support either from their original country or the UK, and they are not allowed to work, so they can't pay for university, nor can they choose to study in another country, unlike other overseas students. That the university should charge them home fees and give bursary support is about to go to CUSU council. This motion would mandate the RCSA president to vote in favour of the support at council and pledge in favour of the campaign.

TB asked if this meant that asylum seekers could be eligible for money than a home student such as himself. Campaigning on this is not a good use of the RCSA's time. AW said that money entitled to would be based on home income in the same way as home students.

Tom Anelay (TA) asked about the point in receiving higher education if they can't work, although he believes in education being a free right up until age eighteen and that he believes that asylum seekers have the right to have jobs. AW said that the eventual hope is for asylum seekers to be able to get jobs, and to start getting them in the system now rather than excluding them.

DG suggested a friendly amendment to change 3, 4 and 5 to 2 a), b) and c). Amendment was accepted.

DG summed up argument on behalf of AW: the motion does not work out the specifics of the issue, just states that the RCSA likes the idea of extending the right to education to people that should receive it.

EM invited the meeting to vote on motion b).

For: 17

Against: 0

Abstain: 9

Motion b) duly passes.

c) International Student Visas

RCSA Notes

1. The government is looking to impose stricter regulations on immigration, and students are not exempt from this.

2. These regulations include: making international students go to their home country to reapply for post-grad study visas, and effectively disallowing staying on to work in the UK after the degree (Tier 4 visas); limiting highly skilled worker permits (Tier 1 visas). This affects university academics. Previously almost unlimited, Oxbridge currently benefits from roughly 350 academics this way. Under the new proposals this will be limited to about 1000 nationwide.

RCSA Believes

1. If these regulations were passed it would be a bad thing for students of the College, the wider University and the World.

2. This not only affects students and academics but also our country, as we are making it more difficult for the brightest people from around the world immigrate to the UK.

3. The proposals are still in the consultation stages so we, as a student body, still have time to make our views on the matter heard.

RCSA Resolves

1. To mandate the overseas officer and the welfare officer to write the letter to senior College staff, University staff, the Public Consultation, our MP and anyone else they can think of express our concern about the proposed regulations.

Proposed: Leo Sideris

Seconded: Rosalyn Old

Leo Sideris (LS) said that the government is putting stricter controls on overseas people coming to UK universities. Top international academics should be allowed to come here.

RO said in addition that the government's plans to stop letting international students stay in the UK after their studies have finished seems not sensible because the UK will then lose the skills that we've invested in.

TP said that one concern the government is trying to stop is 'fake' colleges where people pay them for a year and then stay in country illegally. RO said that we should not get rid of the current visa system just because a few people are abusing it.

Arun Niranjana (AN) said that the new government's points-based immigration system judged potential citizens by their wealth not their contribution to society. AN pointed out that international students already pay a lot to study in the UK.

CH pointed out that the original motion was about several specific points and that the discussion was going off-message.

Clive Newstead (CN) asked which member of the RCSA would write the letter. LS asked for a friendly amendment 'to mandate the overseas officer and the welfare officer to write a letter...'. The amendment was accepted. TP asked for clarification on the meaning of senior college staff. LS said that who was most appropriate to receive the letter hadn't been decided yet.

EM invited the meeting to vote on motion c).

For: 23

Against: 0

Abstain: 3

Motion c) duly passes.

d) High Fidelity Association

THIS MOTION REQUIRES A TWO THIRDS ASSENT TO PASS

RCSA Notes:

1. That there is an amazing record collection atop high court, dating from the founding of the college, which has tragically fallen into disrepair since the mysterious abandonment of vinyl in the late eighties,
2. That, as proven by the surprisingly high attendance at the 1960s bop, Robinson is calling out for a return to the musical glories of days gone by, meaning there would be sufficient interest to restore the vinyl collection to a working and expandable library,
3. That the current film society, despite their best efforts, cannot be expected to organise the vinyl collection on top of their other responsibilities,

RCSA Believes:

1. That there is a need for a contemporary music appreciation society to maintain, organise, develop, and, most importantly, play the records that are but gathering dust in a hidden away room in a hidden away corner,
2. There are enough dedicated music listeners (henceforth referred to as hepcats) to justify the creation of a club to cater for their musical needs,

RCSA Resolves:

1. To form The Robinson College High Fidelity Association (RCHFA). The RCHFA agrees to be bound by the constitution of the RCSA.
2. To amend Appendix 1 of the constitution to include The High Fidelity Association.
3. The aims of the RCHFA shall be:
 - to restore the record collection to a usable condition,
 - to responsibly oversee the management and expansion of the record collection,
 - to encourage the appreciation of full albums in their intended form through regular listening sessions in the college Hi-Fi room.

Proposed: Michael 'A Brimful of Asha on the...' Boyle

Seconded: Elizabeth 'Don't be Cruel' Ayres

MB said that there are lots of vinyl records in the record library that aren't being used. MB requested a friendly amendment to no longer ask for money in the motion (for the record needle). This amendment was accepted.

Chris Truscott (CT) asked if it was possible to include the CD library in the new society's remit. DSH and EM stated that the CD library society still exists. MB still wished to make the amendment to include CDs in the remit. EM decides to ignore the amendment.

EM invited the meeting to vote on motion d).

For: 23

Against: 0

Abstain: 2

Motion d) duly passes.

11. Any other RCSA business

There was no further business.