



RCSA Open Meeting Minutes
6pm, 30th April 2016, JCR



Agenda

1. Apologies for absence or lateness

Sneha Barai, Amy Hall, Patrick Lundgren, Ben Morris.

2. Announcement of the presence and purpose of guests.

N/A

3. Approval of the presence and speaking rights of guests

N/A

4. Approval of the order of the agenda

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.

N/A

6. Matters arising from the minutes

There are no matters arising from the minutes.

7. Reports from the committee

There are no reports from the committee.

8. Questions to the Committee

James Baker (JB): What is happening with the Sky subscription in the TV room?

Karl Thompson (KT): Do we have one?

JB: There is a Sky box but not much else.

KT: I'll look into it after exams.

9. Extraordinary Motions

Chris Barton (CB): I have a motion about room fees, but didn't send it in on time.

KK: We'll put it as the last motion on the agenda.

10. NUS President – referendum discussion

Martha Krish (MK): I am here to listen and to hear everyone's views, to hear points of view that might not have been considered. The point is for myself and Kayani not to speak a great deal.

Mark Driver (MD): Have you sent around the CUSU agenda? I have sent it to the MCR. There has been a lot about affiliation fees in the press and Russell group units pay in fact pay £500 which is less than the amount being reported. The press posted it yesterday. There's a Google Doc which is view only so you can share it. Just an interesting fact about how much CUSU contributes to NUS financially.

KK: Martha and I are open to you messaging us.

Alex Bate (AB): The CUSU motion is not to disaffiliate but to have a referendum. Even if you want to stay in NUS I hope you'd appreciate that we are a democracy so should let the whole of Cambridge have a say. We are not yet voting on whether to leave, but whether we can have the option to vote to leave.

MK: It's also important not to forget the context this is all happening in. Questions have been asked over whether there should be a vote to reaffiliate with NUS every year at CUSU council. Also the fact that this is happening in exam term will privilege the side with people who care the most. I'm not sure if this is the best time for a big democratic process to happen.

MD: But regarding timing – if the election happens near graduation there is a big turnover of grads and influx of freshers. It's better to do it now than have to revisit it in Michaelmas.

AB: I'm not sure if having it in Easter will matter as voting only takes a minute.

MK: I mean in terms of engagement.

Dexter Chua (DC): It takes more than a minute – we should encourage people to think more about the issue.

MD: If we hold the referendum now, grads will have a say but it doesn't really affect them, and it affects freshers more.

MD: There's a similar debate surrounding the EU referendum, whether over 65s should be allowed to vote. Do we want it now or in a few years' time?

Naomi Magnus (NM): I'm probably affected by the fact that I'm Jewish, maybe I'm biased. I'm not sure if I'd want to leave, but a lot of people are saying what are the alternatives and I haven't heard any viable ones. If there wasn't a referendum, people will ignore it as it's easier not to confront a big issue. It would be useful if there could be an alternative directed towards Malia and NUS to let them know that what they said has made many Jewish, and non-Jewish students, uncomfortable.

Matt Kite (MK): She won 50.9% of the vote, winning by just 44 votes, so it's not ridiculous to say she probably won't win next year. Although it's about a broader problem than just her, it's not a foregone conclusion.

Niamh Spence (NS): It's important to note that NUS is not just about this issue. It's of course incredibly important that students aren't made to feel uncomfortable but NUS has done some really great stuff such as elect a full time trans officer, and other progressive things which we want to associate with. She's also said she'll answer questions so there might be a more productive way. There has been a lot in media, some of it twisted, so it's hard to inform yourself with her policies when first articles that come up are from the Telegraph. We should say that there is a problem with the language and rhetoric she is using but I don't think we should have a referendum.

Cammy Mitchell (CM): People don't really know what NUS does, so I think people will vote without hearing arguments from other side.

Ollie Garner (OG): If we have this referendum, we can weigh up things which we want to associate with. It's a good way to engage people with what NUS does. If it's in Michaelmas term, people who are voting on it will be able to make an informed choice.

MD: When it comes to election turnouts in terms of student union, and also the number of candidates running, there is less than 20% turnout. Ignoring the police commissioner elections, this contrasts general elections where 60% turnout considered good. If we're unhappy with what's happened at NUS conference and elections, perhaps we should think more about what it means to us and we should engage with and recognise the problems its causing people here, and try and get a bigger mandate in terms of the policies given out. To be honest even I don't understand that much about how NUS works, but leaving it won't necessarily amend the situation whereas staying and trying to change it could. CUSU only 6 delegates sent, of which only 5 went. Due to fair representation policy, half have to be women but only male candidates ran, as well as the sixth who is president. Priscilla identifies as female but because there are no women standing, Roberta Huldish (education officer) stood. There was not time to reopen nominations so she went instead to fill space. There are generally two major camps – the Labour students and Campaign for Free Education students, two big voting blocs with some in the middle. We should possibly try and engage with Malia at some point but it would need to be political statement as the £500 affiliation fee doesn't really matter.

MK: We need to consider whether NUS disaffiliation is the right way forward, or whether alternative action could be put forward. Jesus JCR is pro referendum, but pro alternative before this. With the exception of Alex, it seems there is a generally pro NUS feeling in the room?

MD: There is a large group in the middle who don't know or care, and it is most important to engage the middle chunk.

Dan Kent (DK): I think that's down to the fact that information out there is from people who really care about the issue so it's hard to engage with it when it comes from extreme ends.

CM: Does anyone know what we actually gain from NUS?

MK: National delegates, legal advice from students' union, and the political voice of students in this country, a lifeline to liberation campaigns such as BME linked to national equivalent, race matter research, general election, training and support for Cambridge officers. There is a new paper in government that could end up ending the cap on tuition fees and NUS is an authority here, lobbying government on student issues for 3m students across the student union. I will put all of this up.

KK: It's almost like a trade union.

KT: I'm not an opponent of democracy but we need informed democracy not reactionary democracy. We won't achieve anything this term, so personally I think you should go on Monday and say have you considered doing this later and not in next few weeks.

MD: If we vote for it, a referendum must be done in the next 21 days.

KT: But this is a problem as that current motion doesn't really apply and has been changing all week.

AB: At a recent NUS conference, they introduced 1 person 1 vote for president. It was voted against in the end, but before it was, 100 delegates attempted to stand outside so there weren't enough people to vote rather than discussing it. This shows an attempt to increase representation in NUS and it was met with hard and fast no.

MK: But this was ruled as undemocratic behaviour by the head of NUS.

MD: Hundreds of delegates are sent, and if it was made 1 person 1 vote, there are fears from some delegates that it would become skewed towards the Russell Group in terms of what NUS represents.

NM: What was it that Jesus actually said? There is an insufficient number who oppose the referendum, but if we're not doing anything else it's as if we are signifying her behaviour is ok because we don't care enough to do anything else.

KK: Any member of the university can propose motion to CUSU council.

MD: Voting is restricted to faculty reps to make sure they attend the meeting. Then Martha and Kayani, and MCR and autonomous campaign reps too.

KK: We can move forward to proposing something else at CUSU council such as an open letter to NUS.

MK: There are ways to mandate CUSU to get things done that aren't a referendum. If what we want to do is make a statement but not disaffiliate, is there any point in having a referendum if the result is not what people really think? Withdrawing engagement further from NUS is never going to be the way to deal with it.

MD: It should speak for all students.

MK: It has presence in the national system, and this debate has moved far away from anti-Semitism as the source of this issue. If all students who care disaffiliate it gives the wrong reaction to something of that nature.

OG: This is a side point but when we elect MPs we know their stand about issues, but when we elect a delegate all we have is their manifesto, experience and general aims; we don't really know how they will vote on motions. That is quite difficult to get engagement when we don't really know what the delegates think.

MK: I think the fact that will loom largest over CUSU council meeting is that whatever we think, J Soc voted 85% in favour of referendum. Whatever we think of NUS, if a student body felt they weren't represented and were oppressed, whoever they are, we owe them a referendum if they feel that strongly.

CM: She has said she wants to engage and apologise, so maybe a statement in a different way with conversation?

KK: There is obviously a lot of sentiment here that NUS is a good body to be a part of, and a statement already has been made in the sense that we are having a discussion about disaffiliation. It has already reached national newspaper headlines, so perhaps the threat alone is a statement.

MK: The reality is that anything she says or any of her actions concerning Jewish students will be scrutinised, for her whole career. She has been held to account in the press. I'm not saying this is enough but there has been a lot of backlash and scrutiny that wouldn't normally be had. But Matt is right – when students have this demand we have to listen. That's the biggest reason I would have for voting for a referendum, even though that's not the way I would want to respond to the situation.

Ed Butler-Caddle (EBC): It's also important to consider that what we do now sets a precedent for similar future situations – if a future president makes remarks we are uncomfortable with, if we do nothing it gives the impression that either we don't care, or if we do have the referendum it gives the impression that we will do this whenever anything controversial is said.

AB: CUSU is meant to vote on NUS reaffiliation every year, and that will hopefully be rectified as it hasn't happened recently. It only takes 350 students signing a petition in order to force a referendum, which is not that many, so it's not a difficult thing to obtain.

MD: There are two points here, one for referendum, and other for disaffiliation. Nobody has said anything massively against having the referendum. The other thing is disaffiliation – is this the right message we should send or should we engage with the newly elected president instead?

NM: I don't think the JCR should support leaving – if we're arguing for democracy we should have the election rather than making up people's minds for them. That's more than agreeing to referendum. Karl talked about having a nuanced debate and we definitely shouldn't agree that we should leave.

MK: The JCR would not take a position on this as it's up to individual people. The question comes down to do we vote against referendum as the way to solve issues, or vote for it because it's been asked for, taking into account the views of students. Those seem to be the big reasons for and against.

KT: I'd say delayed referendum.

MD: Because of how the motions work, that means voting against the motion, and adding resolves to bring it up in Michaelmas.

Bavni Tulsiani (BT): Holding it at a later time would change the outcome. CUSU elections have such a small turnout even with presidential elections and in exam term there won't be people campaigning for either side. If we're having a referendum very soon people won't be aware of other options as we don't have solid idea of this yet. There is uncertainty over whether further action will happen if people say no.

AB: But engagement is higher than normal, as we haven't had to drag people in from the bar, and this engagement might be lost if we delay it. It's in the news now.

DC: This meeting is at a different time from normal, so you can't really compare them.

KT: And there's engagement and there's sensationalist engagement.

Chris Barton (CB): Is it a straight in out referendum?

MD: The council motion is mainly about her comments in a notes, believes, and resolves format about the referendum.

CB: There seems to have been discontent with NUS for a long time, although Malia is the current issue. Is this symptomatic of wider issue? NUS does a lot of good but when Oxford delegates went, their twitter feed for NUS conference was just a joke, as people felt it doesn't really seem to represent students. Its motions about the EU are well recognised as left wing (my own politics are neither here nor there) – does that represent all of student politics?

MD: It's to do with engagement with student unions, which tend to be skewed towards the left.

CB: Holding a referendum does give people a voice and chance to get involved.

MK: So a referendum but not now?

OG: But will it definitely happen if it's delayed?

AB: Not sure if that option will be on the table on Monday.

MD: There will be issues with it in terms of resolves.

KK: The notes say that the referendum is happening because her comments are anti-Semitic.

NS: What is it exactly that CUSU notes? We wouldn't want to be vilifying an individual.

AB: It is quite Malia-centric.

KK: It states she is anti-Semitic. You can Google CUSU council agenda to see it.

Martha reads CUSU motion

NM: Can this be amended at all? I think it would be useful to bring up her comments that the media is on a witch hunt, and her position as a black Muslim woman. It would also be useful to distance from the ISIS comment which has been shown to be distorted.

CM: We might also like to take out that sabbatical officers must stay neutral?

MK: Yes – Mark will do this. We shouldn't gag them.

MK: At the time motion was written, Priscilla was still running as an NUS officer so that was the original justification for gagging officers. It should be about a problem with NUS as a whole, not just her.

KK: Overall do people feel this is a witch hunt proposal?

MK: Can we take some votes, not binding, but to indicate ideas.

Vote to delay referendum: 11/24

Amendments to decrease sensationalism but referendum this term: 9/24

Voting against referendum if it is only this term: 7/25

MK: We don't know which amendments will be proposed as there are 30 different JCRs.

AB: And don't forget anyone can go – Mill Road 7pm, Monday.

11. Ordinary Motions

a) Suitcase scale

RCSA Notes:

1. International students have been asking for a suitcase scale.

RCSA Believes:

1. It would be really helpful for international students to have a suitcase scale to make sure their suitcase is in line with weight specifications and to prevent any unpleasant surprises at the airport.

RCSA Resolves:

1. That a suitcase scale is bought using the open meeting budget. It will not be more than £10.

Proposer: Louise De Paepe

Secunder: Cat Somerville

FOR: Louise De Paepe (LDP): It would be really useful for international students to have a scale they could use to ensure suitcases are within the limits of what they can bring on planes and it would cost about £10 from open meeting budget.

AGAINST:

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QUESTIONS:

NS: The porters already have one so ask them first!

MK: We could get another one so there is more than one.

VOTE

For: 25

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

This motion passes.

b) Welfare Fondue party

RCSA Notes:

1. That exam term is really stressful for everyone.
2. We could all use something to cheer us up a bit, especially at the start of term before everyone gets really focused on revision.
3. Sneha Barai paid for all the food and drink.

RCSA Believes:

1. That everyone loves free food, especially chocolate, so we should have a fondue party to make people happy and reduce stress levels a little bit.
2. It involved buying the chocolate, food to dip into and some drinks.
3. Sneha Barai should be compensated for the cost so she is not out of pocket due to an RCSA event.

RCSA Resolves:

1. That the cost of the supplies (£22.85) should be transferred to her out of the Open Meeting Budget.

Proposer: Sneha Barai

Secunder: Claire McComas

FOR: Claire McComas (CM): There was a fondue party and people seemed happy. Sneha spent money on it and she would like that back, and she has the receipts.

AGAINST:

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QUESTIONS:

AB: There has been a lot of 'we already spent this and can we have money for it' recently, rather than asking for money in advance to do something. I wouldn't vote no but it's discomfoting to continually vote yes,

KT: I think in this case it's something we implicitly allowed in our committee meeting.

VOTE

For: 25

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

This motion passes.

Extraordinary motion

RCSA Notes

1. That accommodation fees at Robinson are amongst the most expensive in Cambridge (even considering KFCs)
2. That as the youngest undergraduate college with the smallest endowment, Robinson is less able to subsidise students' accommodation than other colleges.
3. That room fees may have to change as the demands on the college's finances vary and to allow for inflation.
4. That room fees have increased at a rate far exceeding inflation over the past years with no explanation given for changes. See attached: [Room rates](#)
5. That in general, students do not notice this as each individual's rent is fixed for three years.

6. 4th year students (Engineers, Physical Natural Scientists and MMLs) are particularly affected by the 3 year freeze as the jump in college fee coincides with the reduced maintenance loan in the final year of study – potentially a separate motion required.

RCSA Believes

1. That the college should give an explanation to the students of the reasons for price changes.
2. That the college are answerable to the students.

RCSA Resolves

1. The RCSA committee should raise student concerns on the escalating costs of room fees with College.
2. The RCSA should lobby college to provide reasons for annual room price increases (and do so every year).

Proposer: Chris Barton

Seconder: Niamh Spence

FOR: CB: It's not great for the student body as college has complete control and no one notices.

MK: I have meeting with Bill Nolan so will tell him that we need answers.

AGAINST:

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QUESTIONS:

Ben Gates (BG): You mentioned that 4th year is not fixed – has anything been done?

CB: For us it will be another £400 a year, and maintenance loan goes down in final year of study, so there's a double whammy of costs going up.

KK: I know I'm meant to be impartial, but medics don't get a maintenance grant for final two years of study.

OG: And 3-4% rise is above inflation.

VOTE

For: 25

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

This motion passes.