

St Catherine's College Middle Common Room

Open Meeting Minutes

Sunday 2nd February, 2020
at 7pm in the MCR

In attendance:

30 MCR members in total

Executive Committee Members Present:

Chloe Colson – Co-President (Co-Chair)

Henrique Aguiar – Co-President (Co-Chair)

Ben Jackman – Secretary

James Ayre – Social Secretary



I. Approval of minutes from the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed and approved without objection.

II. Motion: Modifications to the election of MCR's Co-Presidents

Proposed by: Henrique Aguiar

Seconded by: Abelardo De Anda Casas and Francesco Feriozzi

“A proposal to modify the election procedure for the MCR Co-Presidents in the following ways:

Co-Presidents will no longer be obliged to run and be elected as a pair.

One Co-Presidents will be elected in Trinity and one in Michaelmas: the idea is that there is an overlap between incoming and outgoing Presidents, thus making sure there is at least one current Co-President who is aware of all relevant business. This should help smooth the transition from one presidency to the next.

This is to start in the 2020/2021 Academic Year.”

Henrique began by explaining the rationale behind the motion. It would be helpful if there was an overlap in Co-President terms, which would allow for more continuity in the Exec and for the experienced Co-President to pass on knowledge to the new Co-President.

The motion was voted on by a show of hands, and was passed. This motion will involve amendments to the Constitution, which will be drafted and presented to the MCR in coming months.

III. Upcoming Elections

Members of the MCR were reminded of the positions open at the upcoming elections on 23 February. IT Officer, Treasurer, Merchandising Officer and one Social Secretary position were noted as open.

IV. Update on Construction

The new MCR is nearing completion, with construction workers should be finishing in the week following the open meeting. Several members of the Exec will complete a “walk-through” of the new building on Monday 10 February. There are still significant infrastructure requirements - the bar needs to be designed, and it is likely that some furniture needs to be fitted. This is a process that is expected to take weeks. In the meantime, MCR members will still have access to the current MCR until we are satisfied with the set up of the new building.

The Exec is hoping to do the Catz BOP in the new building, if the facility is in suitable shape.

V. Update on Compensation

An update from the Executive Committee about student compensation for construction work.

Members of the MCR Executive will soon be begin compensation talks with the College (and joined by the JCR). An early outline of the proposal the MCR expects to make with the JCR is for a fixed percentage of Michaelmas term rent and a (likely lower) fixed percentage of Hilary Term, up to a negotiated date, be returned to students. Members of the Exec noted that that this is just an opening proposal for the negotiations, and so it is important to understand that the final outcome could be different. Nonetheless, the MCR and JCR have identified clear precedents for compensation for construction, and thus expect to make good headway with the College. To support this case, the MCR has asked students to write about how their lives were disrupted in the current and previous term as a result of ongoing construction works.

An MCR member asked why rent is different between quad and new graduate centre, arguing that it should be different payment. The Presidents noted that this is a distinct issue from the construction issues, but were happy to discuss it. It has been previously discussed with the SCR, who are not keen to change prices. The JCR pays the same no matter what room they are in (their rooms change over different years, so it becomes equalised over each individual undergrad's tenure). This motivates the fixed price scheme. One member argued that the pricing should not be made on the basis of a JCR pricing scheme, and that even if it is a difficult conversation, it should be had for future student cohorts. The Presidents agreed.

A member asked a question about the performance of the Wifi in the new graduate accommodation. Henrique said that the best method for complaints of this regard is to contact the college IT support.

VI. AOB

I. Potential motion in support of student protests at St John's College

Noah Wescombe proposed a potential motion in support of ongoing student protests at St John's College.

Please see the full text of the proposal over page.

Text of proposal

“This MCR notes that:

- a. St John’s College currently has £8.1 million invested in Shell and BP, which are actively starting new fossil fuel projects that and finance misinformation campaigns.
- b. Both the JCR and MCR of St John’s have passed motions in favour of divesting the endowment from fossil fuels, and a petition demanding that the college divest has been signed by over a third of the student body of St John’s. However, over a year since the petition began, the college has yet to divest the endowment.
- c. Students from St John’s and the rest of the university have been occupying the front quad of St John’s college, demanding that the college move its investments out of fossil fuel companies immediately and declare a climate emergency.
- d. The action has been peaceful.
- e. In response to this action, college has deactivated the keys of several St John’s students involved in the occupation and cut off supply lines into the college, making it difficult for the occupants to access food.

This MCR believes that:

- f. The climate crisis is a real existential threat, and an Oxford college has a duty to its members to not support companies which threaten the climate and fund misinformation campaigns.
- g. St John’s effective punishment of students involved in the action is an abuse of power that is reactive to the threat that the activists present to an entrenched financial system.
- h. Members of the MCR support the action of members of Direct Action for Divestment in St John’s College.

This MCR therefore resolves to:

- i. Mandate the President of the MCR to send a letter to Maggie Snowling, the President of St John’s College, and Andrew Parker, the Principal Bursar, communicating support of the activists from the JCR and asking that St John’s administration cooperate with the activists on their demands.
- j. Add item h and i to standing policy.”

Discussion of Proposal

One member of the MCR asked a question about why the MCR should support a position that only 1/3rd of St John’s have signed. Noah stated that this is just how many people have signed it so far, and that his expectation is that this number will increase.

One of the Co-President asked if sending a letter directly to the St Johns SCR would be the most appropriate action, noting that there is a distinction between writing a letter to the college versus making a statement. The other Co-President suggested waiting for input on this matter from the SCR would be appropriate, as the JCR and MCR apparently have a meeting to discuss this matter scheduled for the days following this open meeting. A member of the MCR Exec also noted that some of the claims made by the protesters have been disputed. Noah disagreed that delays were necessary.

A member of the MCR asked what proportion of the Catz endowment is in fossil fuels. No one in attendance was aware, although this information may be in possession of the MCR. This member argued that we need to be sure we don't have any money in the Catz endowment invested in fossil fuels before we make public statements, lest we subtract from our credibility by seeming hypocritical. Noah argued that this might be excessively cautious, but recognised that this might be a view shared by others in the MCR. Another member of the MCR noted that lots of our investment is in managed funds, and so this might take some time to review how that is working. This member also noted that the central university's fund (which manages a share of all college assets) has not completely divested from fossil fuels yet, and so argued there is still some progress to be made.

Another member of the MCR noted that the people asked to write this letter (the Co-Presidents) are also directly responsible for current negotiations with the Catz SCR in regards to construction compensation. They argued that this makes the timing of this matter somewhat sensitive. Noah argued that the SCR was unlikely to be concerned significantly. One of the Co-Presidents argued that since the SCR wants to discuss the matter, they care at least somewhat.

One member of the MCR argued that the proposed public display of support is relatively minor and should not be controversial, and said they were not convinced by the idea that there were any relevant political considerations.

Finally, a member made a general point about the optics of a potential public display of support and the current information available to the MCR. This member said that if we had more information and spoke to the SCR, the MCR could make a more informed decision in the next open meeting.

One of the Co-Presidents raised a motion to table discussion on the proposed motion until the next open meeting. This motion was raised and passed by show of hands.

II. Oxford Student Union Visit

Peerce McManus has been in contact with Oxford Student Union, who have offered to visit the Catz MCR to update us on what they Student Union is up to at the moment. Peerce noted that we have a seat on the OSU (for meetings etc) but do not often take advantage of this meeting, and that the MCR should consider doing so in future.

Meeting was closed.