

Sidney Sussex College

Minutes of the
MEETING OF COLLEGE COUNCIL
Held via Zoom on Wednesday 2 December 2020

Senior Members Present

The Master, Vice-Master, Senior Tutor, Bursar, Dr Doran, Dr Fulda, Dr Garcia-Mayoral, Dr McTernan, Dr Oner, Professor Reynolds, Dr Roberts, Dr Seymour, Dr Stasch

Student Members Present

Mr Bryan, Mr Karsberg, Mr Mettry

Also Present

Ms Harkin (College Registrar/Council Secretary)
Mr Lowry (JCR President Elect) – as observer

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

1. INTRODUCTORY BUSINESS

1.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Fruk and Mr Sharma.

1.2 Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved, subject to the unstarring of item 3.7a (i).

1.3 Declaration of Interests

The following interests were declared:

- Senior Members have an interest in item 2.1c as members of USS.
- Student Members have an interest in item 1.4a (student accommodation and catering charges) and 3.10a (F&N minutes with reference to proposal re SSCSU subscription).
- Dr Roberts has an interest in item 2.1b as secretary to the Research Fellowship Competition.

1.4 Confirmation of the minutes of the unreserved business of the Meeting of Council on 11 November 2020 (CC.201201.1.4))

The minutes were confirmed subject to Dr Fulda requesting that the report of the Foundation Year discussion at item 2.2d be amended to include his

observation on the implications of the initiative for supervisory and tutorial workload. He also requested that the remarks attributed to the Dean in the minutes of 2.2d be attributed instead to Dr Fulda, as he was not making them in his role as Dean, but as that of trustee. The Master agreed that both points would be considered.

a) Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda
2.3f Student Accommodation and Catering charges (COVID policies) (CC.201202.1.4a)

The Bursar outlined the background to the Open letter received from some students. The Open letter requested that as an alternative to the offer of 50% of Kitchen Fixed Charge (KFC) being converted to Minimum Meal Charge (MMC) for Michaelmas Term, that a 40% write off of KFC was offered instead of 10%. She noted that 70-80 students had signed the Open letter which bore witness to a concern deserving of consideration by Council. She also reported that there had been almost 200 responses to the catering charge referendum based on the option of 50% commutation of KFC to MMC, or 10% write off of KFC. 87% had opted for the option that provided for 50% commutation for Michaelmas Term.

The JCR president stated that he personally had not signed the letter, and that it was not endorsed by the JCR executive as a body, on the basis that a 40% write off of KFC was perceived to be too high and that the JCR had calculated that 15% would be reasonable. . However, the JCR believed that even if a 15% write off of KFC were offered, the 50% commutation of KFC to MMC would still be preferable to the majority of students and so the outcome of the referendum would not change.

One Council member asked whether there was an issue in the fact that the College was providing a financial incentive for students to use Hall in a climate (COVID-19) where there may be health concerns amongst students to using it. The JCR president pointed out that this was not a reason used in the letter and that in a survey of students about College accommodation and catering, the majority of the 130 respondents had expressed that they were comfortable with the measures that the College had introduced to make catering and dining COVID secure. The Bursar also noted that there was no restriction on when during the year the meal credit could be used.

Council **agreed** that the letter should be noted, but that the College should proceed with the option which the majority of students had voted for in the consultation.

2. REPORTS FROM OFFICERS

2.1 Master's Business

a) Feedback on Inter-Collegiate Committee Business

The Master noted that only the Senior Tutors' Committee had met formally since the last Council meeting. Two key topics discussed were to do with pre admissions testing (which would be discussed under 2.2.b) and the strategic review on admissions which the University was currently undertaking. In the latter, an interim report had been published but there were still a number of questions that need addressing, including how central university admissions and the Colleges would work together, how applicants should be deselected, and how to maximise cost efficiencies.

b) Research Fellowship Competition decision

The Master reminded Council that it had agreed in the summer not to hold a stipendiary research fellowship competition in 2020-21, but that the decision as to whether or not to hold a non-stipendiary one would be revisited in Michaelmas term. He explained that the Finance & Needs Committee had discussed this and made the recommendation that a single non-stipendiary Research Fellowship Competition in the Arts should be held this year in order to level up the number of Arts Research Fellowships with those in the Sciences.

It was noted that it would be a three year Fellowship and although non-stipendiary would still involve costs in terms of providing free accommodation and meals, as well as a cash benefit in the form of a research allowance of £1k per year. Over the three years, this amounts to approximately £30-35k.

Council discussed the merits of the recommendation. Specific points raised were that potentially the money should be held back for a 2021-22 competition given the current negative financial position. It was also queried how advantageous it would be to an Arts Early Careers researcher to receive a Fellowship that was non-stipendiary, when it is more difficult for an Arts researcher to secure a postdoctoral position and/or external funding than it is for a Science researcher.

On balance, Council agreed that the costs were affordable given that they were largely opportunity costs rather than cash outlay, that it was beneficial to the College to have early career researchers as part of the Fellowship and College community, and that for the researcher him/herself, affiliation to a College would make a difference to a researcher's overall status when applying for future funding opportunities. Council **approved** Finance & Needs Committee's recommendation.

The Master noted that Dr Roberts would continue to be the Competition's secretary but would perform this role on half-stipend this year given that one rather than two Research Fellows were being recruited. Council **confirmed** the proposal that Dr Wilson-Lee chair the competition. It was **agreed** by Council that the competition should be held later than normal to give potential applicants more time to secure postdoctoral positions or external funding. It was also **agreed** that the applicant field should be widened to encompass all the Arts, Humanities and Social Science subjects this year, rather than rotating between the two Arts Schools as was usually the case.

**c) Joint letter to USS re recent valuation
(enclosed)(CC.201202.2.1c)**

The Master explained that he had been asked to sign the joint letter to USS as Head of House and sought Council's permission to do so.

He reminded Council that in a previous Council meeting, the trustee body had concluded that, as trustees who were in the main also members of USS, they each had a material interest in the outcomes of USS consultations where potential member benefits were being directly consulted upon. Accordingly it has been agreed that the College should not formally respond to consultations since it was conflicted.

However, in this instance, the College is being asked to sign a letter, which is written jointly with UCU, asking USS to reconsider the approach that has been taken to the presentation of the assumptions for the most recent valuation of the scheme, which it is widely held are not helpful to the consultation. Hence, with this distinction, whether Council would agree that there was not a conflict of interest in this instance, and if not, whether they were happy for him to sign the letter on behalf of the College?

The Master stated that there had been input from UCU in the drafting of the letter. Subject to this understanding being confirmed, Council **approved** the Master signing the letter.

2.2 Senior Tutor Business

a) End of Michaelmas term and beginning Lent term travel arrangements

The Senior Tutor described the work that had been taking place to prepare for the end of term and beginning of next term in terms of student exodus and return, as well as arrangements for those students staying on in College over the Christmas vacation. He explained that staggered departures and a system for exit had been planned, and that for those staying on, consideration had been given to ensuring there was as much flexibility as possible in the use of rooms within College. He noted that, since 24 November, no students resident

in College accommodation had tested positive for COVID-19. The College awaited further Government direction on the arrangements for student return after the Christmas vacation.

**b) Pre-admissions testing pilot programme: future of funding
(CC.201202.2.2b)**

The Senior Tutor spoke to the paper, summarising the Intercollegiate Committees' discussion to date on pre-admissions testing and how it should be managed and paid for. He explained that last year, a commitment to significant savings had been made (£300k), and it had agreed by Colleges' Committee that these savings be made from charging applicants for the assessments they sit.

The Senior Tutors Committee has worked up a more detailed proposal which the Colleges' Committee will be discussing at Colleges' Committee in order to arrive at a decision. The proposal provides that the Computer Science test be substituted for a test that is publicly available, that international students be charged double the current application fee (i.e.£60 instead of £30).

It was explained that the timing for the decision is not ideal (the Bursars Committee have not had a chance to discuss the proposal) and it is difficult to come up with a long term solution as the HE sector and admissions processes may be very different in 2-3 years' time. The Senior Tutor therefore recommended the current set of proposals as a short term solution. It was noted that the pre-admissions costs being discussed were only part of the overall costs of the UG admissions system with the staff resource involved being far more significant.

The Master agreed to raise the concerns about the timing and process of the decision at College's Committee and to suggest that consultation needed to start much earlier in future.

Council **agreed** the proposal.

**c) *Annual Prevent Accountability Statement and Data Return
(CC.201202.2.2c)**

Council **noted** that the Prevent Accountability Statement and Data Return had been submitted to the Office for Students, following approval by Council by earlier email circulation. The Master thanked everybody involved in compiling the submission.

d) *Annual Library Report (2019-20) (CC.201202.2.2d)

Council **noted** the annual library report.

2.3 Bursarial Business

a) Risk Horizon Scan 2021 (CC.202102.2.3a)

The Bursar outlined the annual process for the College's management of its risks and explained that having reviewed the current set of risks at the last Council meeting, this was an opportunity for the trustees to look ahead and identify any new emerging risks that would need to be added to the risk register and managed and mitigated next year.

The issue of supply chain vulnerability, within the context of Brexit, and the difficulties that this might cause to college management next term, was raised by a Council member. It was noted that the wider implications of Brexit for the College should be kept under review.

b) COVID policies and protocols

i Visitor policy

The Bursar explained that she sought agreement in principle from Council that should Cambridge revert back to tier one in terms of COVID-19 restrictions, then the College's visitor policy should revert back to the provisions agreed at the Extraordinary Meeting on the 29 October 2020 (paper CC.201029.2.1).

Council **agreed** in principle to this proposal.

ii *HR guidance (CC.201202.2.3bii)

Council **noted** the updated HR guidance.

c) **Appeals – Michaelmas 2020 (CC.201202.2.3c)

Council **approved** the proposed financial contribution to the listed appeals.

2.4 Development Director

There was no Development Director's business.

2.5 Steward's Business

There was no Steward's business.

2.6 Student Business

a) Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity proposal

The JCR President explained his view that there was not a coherent College forum for following up on equality, diversity and inclusivity issues and that he was proposing that a committee be established to focus specifically on this area, with representatives from both the JCR and MCR. He sought a mandate for the Principal Officers to work on this and to bring back a proposal to Council next term.

The Vice-Master stated that he supported the initiative and that it was important for the College to have a strategy for dealing with these issues. He explained that the Principal Officers had pledged to look at this.

Action: The Principal Officers to work on this and bring a proposal for a way forward back to Council in the Lent term.

3. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

3.1 Prevent Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 29 October 2020 (CC.201202.3.1a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

- i) **Terms of Reference (CC.202102.3.1ai)

Council **approved** the updated Terms of Reference.

3.2 Muniment Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 12 October 2020 (CC.201202.3.2a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

3.3 Chapel Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.3)

Council **noted** the minutes.

3.4 Library Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 3 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.4a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

3.5 Investment Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 4 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.5a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

- i) Investment Policy (CC.201202.3.5ai)

The Bursar explained that once approved, the intention is to publish the Investment policy on the College website. The policy would be accompanied by a cover statement, the drafting of which she proposed be delegated to the Investment Committee. It was noted that other Cambridge colleges published their investment policy and that transparency was encouraged by the Charity Commission.

Council **approved** the revised Investment Policy and **agreed** to its publication on the College's website.

3.6 IT Steering Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 13 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.6a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

3.7 Building & Environment Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.7a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

- i) Terms of Reference – Building & Environment Committee (CC.201202.3.7ai)

The JCR President noted that the roles of JCR Accommodation Officer and JCR Green Officer would be combined from Lent Term into one role, the JCR Building & Environment Officer. Hence the Building and Environment Committee's Terms of Reference needed to be amended to reflect this.

The terms of reference were **approved** subject to this amendment.

- ii)** Health & Safety policy (CC.201202.3.7aii)

Council **approved** the updated policy for the Master to sign and be uploaded on the website.

iii)**Terms of Reference – Health & Safety Committee
(CC.201202.3.7aiii)

Council **approved** the updated Terms of Reference.

3.8 Student Awards Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 14 July 2020 (CC.201202.3.8a)
- b) *Minute of the meeting of 17 November 2020 (CC.201117.3.8b)

Council **noted** the two sets of minutes.

3.9 Staff Liaison Committee

- a) *Minutes of the meeting of 20 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.9a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

3.10 Finance & Needs Committee

- a) Minutes of the meeting of 24 November 2020 (CC.201202.3.10a)

The Bursar drew attention to, and commented upon, a number of points recorded in the Finance & Needs Committee minutes:

6c. Five year forecast

Attention was drawn to the significant predicted deficit next year, with the College expected to break even the following year, but noting that the current ongoing triennial valuation of both pension schemes would conclude next summer, with early indications that the further negative financial impact on the College are likely to be significant.

8. Application of legacy

This had now been realised with £410k having been allocated to the kitchen project in recognition of the generosity of the legator. It was noted that this would have a positive impact on the free reserves position.

10b. Proposed SSCSU subs for 2020-21

The background to Finance & Needs Committee proposal to reduce the SSCSU subscription by 20% for 2020-21 (approximately £10k) was explained, emphasising that the College's free reserves were in a negative position, and the impact of COVID-19 had led to budget cuts across all areas of the College. SSCSU currently had sizeable reserves

as they had not spent their full budget over the last few years, and there was an agreed intention to reduce the level of these. Because of this, the proposed one off reduction in subs would not negatively impact current students.

The JCR President felt that insufficient notice had been given for the subscription cut to allow it to be properly planned for and anticipated. Whilst he agreed that SSSU had sizeable reserves, there was a plan being developed to reduce the reserves which involved expenditure on longer term projects, rather than regular activity. He noted that the recently agreed increase in flexibility in the SSSU budget process should ensure that future budgets were not underspent in-year.

The Senior Tutor noted that there was a wider conversation to be had about College expenditure on welfare support, and he was not sure it fell to the JCR body to take this on.

Council **agreed** that the 20% one-off subscription cut as a contribution to COVID savings would be imposed, but should be delayed by a year until 2021-22.

12b. Review of temporary recruitment protocol

Finance & Needs Committee recommended the ending of the temporary recruitment freeze when the current freeze ends on 31 December 2020. Council **approved** the recommendation.

12c. Proposal for additional tutorial support

Finance & Needs Committee have agreed £5k funding of additional Tutor support for Lent Term and Easter Term 2020-21. The Senior Tutor explained that this would bolster the pastoral services that have seen high demand during the pandemic.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 Any other business

The Master noted it was the JCR President's last Council meeting and thanked Mr Bryan for the outstanding job that he and the rest of the JCR committee had done this year, particularly with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 27 January 2021 at 2.00pm.