

Sidney Sussex College

The Minutes of the Meeting of
COLLEGE COUNCIL
Held via Zoom on Wednesday 24 February 2021

Senior Members Present

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

Student Members Present

Mr Lowry, Mr Karsberg, Mr Mettry, Mr Velazhahan

Also Present

Ms Harkin (College Registrar/Council Secretary)

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

1. INTRODUCTORY BUSINESS

1.1 Apologies for absence

None.

1.2 Approval of Agenda

Agenda approved subject to:

- 2.1c – unstarred by request of the JCR President
- 2.2a – unstarred by request of Dr Fulda.
- 2.2d – it was noted that the update would be verbal
- 2.3a – it was noted that an open letter from students relating to this agenda item had been circulated to Council members outside normal Council procedure; the Master proposed that this would be dealt with when the meeting reached this item
- 2.3ci – unstarred by request of Mr Karsberg
- 3.1-3.7 – the Master explained that this list of Committee minutes should have been starred.

1.3 Declaration of Interests

Dr Garcia Mayoral declared a personal interest in item 2.1f. The student representatives declared a personal interest in item 2.3a.

1.4 Confirmation of the minutes of the unreserved business of the Meeting of Council on 27 January 2021 (CC.210224.1.4)

The minutes were confirmed.

a) Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

There were no matters arising.

2. REPORTS FROM OFFICERS

2.1 Master's Business

a) Feedback on Inter-Collegiate Committee Business

The Master summarised the topics discussed at the recent Senior Tutors' and Bursars' Committees:

- The College's student return policy – it was noted that the general principles for student return were compliant with the inter-collegiate university.
- Changes to Tripos – it was noted that Chemical Engineering were proposing to start accepting students who requested a change into Year 1, and that architecture had developed a new Tripos in Design. Both changes had been accepted but the Senior Tutor's Committee had queried where the additional student numbers for the Design Tripos would be accommodated.
- OIS's recent 'Data Protection self-assessment' audit of the Colleges has been published.
- The University's recruitment of an additional counsellor was noted.
- Proposed revision to the Cambridge Bursary Scheme (CBS2). The Master noted that the proposal for implementation from October 2021 will come back to the next Council meeting for decision once it has been reviewed by the Finance and Needs Committee.

b) Research Fellowship Competition – interview panel

The Vice-Master proposed that the interview panel for the competition would consist of Dr Wilson-Lee as the Chair, Dr Roberts as secretary, and Dr Duschinsky, Professor McKitterick, Dr Saunders, and Dr Gilby as the other panel members. Council **approved** the panel.

c) Flag flying policy - schedule update for 2021 (CC.210224.2.1c)

The Master noted that the 2021 schedule incorporates a change to align with the University's own flag flying policy, that is the flying of the Rainbow Pride flag at the end (in addition to the beginning) of LGBT+ History Month.

The JCR President explained that he had requested the item be unstarred because of a recent SCSU motion to request Council to fly the Transgender Pride flag on International Transgender Day of Visibility. This request had been prompted by a transphobic incident in College last year, as well as transphobia more widely.

The Master gave the background to previous Council discussion and decisions on flag flying, including Council's view that the College should support the rainbow flag, but that there should be caution against allowing a proliferation of flags supporting different identities.

The Senior Tutor suggested that a way forward could be to fly the LGBT Trans flag at the end of the LGBT+ History month.

A member proposed that instead of considering flag flying on a case by case basis, there should be a wider consultative process, across the College community, on the flag flying schedule, and the guiding principles for supporting specific identities.

Council **agreed** the Schedule and that the Equality Diversity and Inclusion working group should consider these issues.

d) Review of College Statement on Freedom of Speech (C.210224.2.1d)

The Master explained that Office of Inter-Collegiate Services had asked the Colleges to review their Freedom of Speech statement in light of the amendments recently made to the University's Statement. Both the Prevent and Education and Pastoral Committees had concluded that Sidney's current statement was in alignment and should be retained as currently worded. Council **noted** this.

e) Equality Diversity and Inclusion working group membership

The Vice-Master confirmed that the working group would be convening for the first time in the Easter term and that the proposed membership would be: the Vice-Master, Senior Tutor, HR Manager, Professor Armstrong, Dr Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Dr Ranasinghe, Mr Lowry (representing the JCR) and Ms Dadiya (representing the MCR). Ms Harkin, as Registrar, will serve as a consultant to the working group. Council **endorsed** the composition of the working group.

The Vice-Master expressed the hope that the EDI group would provide a space for EDI issues to be discussed in a more formal way than the College has previously been able to. It was noted that links should be made with EDI groups working within the University Schools and Departments if feasible. Council will be kept updated in respect of the work and actions carried out by the group.

f) Visiting Fellowships 2022

The Master reminded Council that College usually seeks nominations for the calendar year ahead for Visiting Fellows. Because of the COVID pandemic, four Visiting Fellows had not had a chance to take up their Visiting Fellowship since Easter Term 2020. Two of the Visiting Fellow who had been due to visit over this time period had expressed an interest in coming in 2022 instead. Council **agreed** that two of the three Visiting Fellow places available in 2022 should be allocated to these two Visiting Fellows.

Action: The Master would write to the Fellowship inviting nominations for MT2022.

g) **Fund regulations

**(i) Prakash and Anjali Melwani Student Wellbeing Fund
(CC.210224.2.1gi)**

Council **approved** the Fund's regulations.

**h) **Permission request from Nippon TV: NTV Quiz Show to use photos and article of 'The World's most overdue library book'
(CC.210224.2.1f)**

Council **granted** the request. The Bursar confirmed that there was no need to charge a fee as no loan was required but it was noted that the Archivist should request the College be credited.

2.2 Senior Tutor Business

**a) Undergraduate Admissions report 2020-21 cycle
(GB.210224.2.2a)**

A concern was raised about the apparent inequity of how candidates applying for an organ scholarship are selected. Because of the timing of the organ competition, these candidates are not interviewed at the same time as the rest of their year's cohort and are therefore not benchmarked against the rest of the cohort. Council **agreed** that there was a potential issue and that it should be referred to Education and Pastoral Committee. It was recognised that the timing of the competition and the interviews for organ scholars was an inter-

collegiate arrangement which could not be changed by the College acting alone, but the College could feed concerns into the University admissions review.

b) Pastoral support report 2019-20 (CC.210224.2.2b)

The Senior Tutor explained that the aim of the report was to establish a baseline of student well-being benchmarks and measures which could be used to compare against as new well-being initiatives were introduced. The Senior Tutor noted that it was not yet complete in terms of proposed content as it was missing the student voice.

In ensuing discussion it was flagged that the role of the Directors of Studies should not be overlooked as students often went to their Director of Studies first when they had a pastoral issue. It was also felt that some resource and cost measures should be included in the report to show the substantial investment in this area by the College. It was further noted that the cohort size that Tutors were dealing with was hard to sustain and needed reviewing.

The Senior Tutor agreed with the points made and confirmed that they would be considered going forward.

c) Exam safety net (CC.210224.2.2c)

The Senior Tutor spoke to the paper which was **noted** by Council.

d) Administration of student discipline for COVID rule breaches

The Senior Tutor explained that he would like Council's steer on the use of fines to tackle student breaches of the College's COVID rules.

The Senior Tutor outlined the background to the proposal to introduce fines temporarily. Although the majority of students had adhered to the rules, there had been a number of incidents and repeat offenders which had caused anxiety and increased the risk to people working and residing in College. To date a mix of reflective essays, restorative justice meetings, and community service had been used when these breaches had occurred. However, restorative justice meetings were resource intensive, and community service was difficult to administer in lockdown. For this reason a temporary introduction of fines for COVID breaches had been proposed.

There had been consultation with students on this proposal and a few modifications made to it as a result. This included the agreement that there should be no fine for an initial offence.

The JCR President, and other student representatives present, expressed the view that Sidney's student body had demonstrated high compliance with the rules and that the few breaches that had occurred had been due to frustration with the ongoing restrictions and isolation that everybody was experiencing. They did not feel that fines were the way to tackle these root causes.

Council agreed that SCSU would work with the Senior Tutor to agree a workable non-fine alternative which, if agreed, would be brought back to Council.

2.3 Bursarial Business

a) Student Accommodation and Catering charges: Proposals for 2021-22 (CC.210224.2.3a)

An open letter signed by 160 students, and circulated to Council members by the previous JCR President prior to the meeting, was accepted for discussion. It was noted however that it was not a JCR endorsed document, and that prior unapproved circulation was not normally procedurally acceptable. Council agenda items and/or supporting papers relating to student business should in future be submitted through the JCR or MCR President in advance of Council papers being circulated.

The Bursar spoke to the paper which amended the proposal concerning charges for student accommodation and catering for 2021-22 which had originally been circulated for the January 2021 Council meeting. She highlighted that there was student support for the restructuring of catering charges, but ongoing student concern over the proposed cohort price increase for accommodation charges for the 2021 cohort. She went on to explain that:

- Cohort pricing meant that increases above inflation increases would not apply to current students.
- Accommodation charges needed to be increased to remove the current deficit on accommodation and hence meet the College's charitable objectives (which was to use funds for its primary purpose of education, as opposed to offering subsidised accommodation). Current College charges are in the lowest quartile for all Colleges, and significantly lower than annual charges in private accommodation or when compared with Anglia Ruskin.
- It was not true, as inferred in the students' open letter, that the College had not invested in accommodation. Over £10M had been invested in major works over the last eight years in addition to the current investment of £13M in the kitchen project.

- The use of the term 'end goal' in previous discussions and in the students' open letter did not reflect the proposal which set out a trigger for a rent review. The proposed trigger is that a rent increase for the incoming cohort would only be considered if the College annual median charges for an undergraduate were within the lowest quartile across the Cambridge Colleges.
- The discussion about the need for Sidney to raise its accommodation charges had been taking place well before the COVID pandemic, and it was confirmed that the proposal was not about recouping pandemic losses.

The JCR President explained that the JCR were not objecting to a raise in rent charges. What they were requesting was a postponement of the decision until Easter Term in order to work on it further. They would like to work towards developing a better benchmark for comparing Sidney's rent charges and accommodation quality with other Colleges.

In response, it was questioned as to how feasible it would be to engage in a quantitative information gathering and benchmarking exercise in order to arrive at a consensus that had the students' trust, particularly one that could be arrived at within a reasonable time period.

In concluding the discussion, the Master asked for Council members to vote on whether they wanted to endorse one of options set out in the Bursar's paper.

Council approved option 2 which provides for: '...a 3% cohort pricing increase for 2021-22 intake, and a further 3% cohort pricing increase for 2022-23 intake. Subject to the trigger outlined in section 4, the 3% cohort price increase in 2022-23 would not be implemented if Sidney's annual undergraduate charges were not in the lowest quartile against all other Colleges including fixed catering charges.'

b) COVID update: operational

The Bursar referred to the update provided to Governing Body. She said that the Operations Working Group would be starting to look at what needs to be done to welcome students back next term within Government guidelines and regulations.

c) Council permission in line with Visitor Policy

(i) Wedding Bookings (CC.210224.2.3ci)

The Bursar outlined the recent wedding bookings and, in line with the current College Visitor policy, sought Council permission for these to proceed if the proposed event was within

Government regulations in place at the time, and the couple still wished to proceed. A student member queried why these were going ahead when students were so restricted by the College's COVID rules. The Master explained that the weddings would be conducted within the national COVID regulations and that they involved alumni, not general members of the public. The Bursar also explained that only dates in the vacation would be considered, not during term time. Council **approved** the wedding bookings in principle.

(ii) *Former Fellow's funeral 5 March 2021 (agreed by circulation)

Council **noted** that permission Prof Nisbet's funeral service to take place within College, and within Covid guidelines, had been agreed by circulation.

2.4 Development Director

There was no business to report.

2.5 Steward's Business

There was no business to report.

2.6 Student Business

a) *MCR Report and Plans for Lent term (CC.210224.2.6a)

Council **noted** the MCR's report.

3. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

3.1 Communications steering group

a) *Unreserved minutes of the meeting of 20 January 2021
(CC.210224.3.1a)

The minutes were **noted**.

3.2 Investment Committee

a) *Unreserved minutes of the meeting of 03 February 2021
(CC.210224.3.2a)

The minutes were **noted**.

3.3 Prevent Committee

a) *Unreserved minutes of the meeting of 04 February 2021
(CC.210224.3.3a)

The minutes were **noted**.

3.4 Development Committee

a) *Unreserved minutes of the meeting of 05 February 2021
(CC.210224.3.4a)

The minutes were **noted**.

3.5 Buildings and Environment Committee

a) *Unreserved minutes of the meeting of 15 February 2021
(CC.210224.3.5a)

The minutes were **noted**.

3.6 Library Committee

a) *Unreserved minutes of the meeting of 16 February 2021
(CC.210224.3.6a)

The minutes were **noted**.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 Any other business

There was no other business.

4.2 Date of Next Meeting

2pm on Wednesday, 17 March, 2021