

Sidney Sussex College

The Minutes of the meeting of
COLLEGE COUNCIL
Held via Zoom on Wednesday 27 January 2021

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

Senior Members Present

The Master, Vice-Master, Senior Tutor, Bursar, Dr Bordin, Dr Doran, Dr Fruk,
Dr Garcia-Mayoral, 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)

1. INTRODUCTORY BUSINESS

1.1 Apologies for absence

Professor Reynolds, Dr Fulda (for unreserved business) and Dr Oner. The new JCR and MCR Presidents, Jake Lowry and Vaithish Velazhahan, were welcomed to their first meeting.

1.2 Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved subject to:

- Item 2.3a (ii) being removed and deferred to the next Council meeting in February.
- Item 2.2c being single starred.
- The JCR President requesting that the topic of 'impact of COVID on student well-being and outcomes' be added as an item of AOB.

1.3 Declaration of Interests

The student representatives declared an interest in item 2.3a (i).

1.4 Confirmation of the minutes of the unreserved business of the Meeting of Council on 02 December 2020 (CC.210127.1.4)

a) Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda

1.4 Minutes of unreserved business - Council meeting 11-11-2020

The Master confirmed that appropriate changes had been made to the minutes pursuant to Dr Fulda's request at the last meeting of Council.

2.1b Research Fellowship Competition

The Vice-Master recapped the decision approved by Council at the last meeting and confirmed that the deadline for applications to the Competition would be 1 June 2021 this year in order to allow for the results from grant funding bodies in May. An interview panel is currently being set up and membership will be brought to Council at its meeting in February for approval. An election is anticipated at the Annual Meeting in July.

2.1c Joint letter to USS re recent valuation

The Master confirmed that the UCU had been signatories to, as well as involved in the drafting of, the joint letter to USS. A lengthy response had been received from USS which was currently being considered by the University.

2. REPORTS FROM OFFICERS

2.1 Master's Business

a) Changes in Council membership

The Master reported the following changes in Council membership:

- Mr Sharma has stepped down as MCR President and has been replaced for the remainder of his term by Mr Velazhahan.
- Dr Sumnall resigned as she is unable to attend because of her maternity leave.
- Dr McTernan has resigned having obtained a post elsewhere

On behalf of Council, the Master thanked them all for their services.

b) Feedback on Inter-Collegiate Committee Business

Colleges Committee has met since the last Council meeting in early December. The Master summarised the topics that had been discussed. These included:

- The proposal for admissions testing was in the main agreed. It was also agreed to start working on resolving the ongoing issues with funding of the tests immediately.
- A working group set up on Size and Shape of the University is meeting and has begun to make some recommendations, which

in the short term includes increasing the intake to taught Masters courses. Colleges are generally not keen on increasing undergraduate numbers significantly, though a few colleges may accommodate the University's ambitions via expansion.

- The strategic review of admissions and outreach has been progressing slowly. There has been some progress on outreach with the potential of a proposal to reform the area link scheme by making it regional with Colleges working collaboratively over a wider area.

c) Equality Diversity Inclusion (EDI) working group

The Vice-Master spoke to this item, reminding Council that the JCR had proposed increasing the College's focus and work on equality, diversity and inclusion issues. In response, a working group will be set up. Membership will be reported to Council at its next meeting but will include the Vice-Master, Senior Tutor, representatives from the JCR, MCR, Fellows, and staff. It will convene for the first time in Easter term and its remit will be to review EDI in College and to make sure appropriate policies and processes are in place. The College is committed to this work and the Senior Tutor thanked the JCR for raising the issue.

d) **Council Planner amended (CC.210127.2.1d)

The Master explained that the Council planner had been amended to push back timing of discussion of strategic planning to the Easter Term; this change in timing is proposed due to the pressure of other commitments. **Council approved** this amendment.

e) Committee meetings Lent term

Council approved the proposal that committee meetings should continue to take place online for Lent term.

f) Foundation Feast

Council approved the proposal to cancel the Foundation Feast in light of the ongoing situation with COVID-19.

The Master noted that this year was the 425th anniversary of foundation of the College and would propose that Council consider early next term if there is anything that can be done to celebrate this anniversary via an alternative event in the summer. **Council agreed** to this proposal.

g) **Mike Styles Bursaries and other Student Support Fund Regulations (CC.210127.2.1g)

Council approved the Mike Styles Bursaries and Other Student Support Fund Regulations.

2.2 Senior Tutor Business

a) Teaching and pastoral support for students in Lent term

The Senior Tutor summarised the teaching and pastoral support arrangements in place this term. The government has issued guidance that the majority of student should not return to University and all University and College teaching is currently on-line, with the exception of elements of certain designated subjects. The challenges this has thrown up, both academic and pastoral, are being addressed by:

- Individual, personalised discussion with students to ensure those unable to work adequately and safely from home could return;
- Support of all those who are working remotely;
- Focus on zero-contact services from the College library, including printing of lecture notes for students with Specific Learning Disabilities;
- Provision of tablets for supervisors as well as students;
- Social bubbles, household moves, and relocation of Cromwell first years to the main College site to avoid isolation;
- Postponement of Academic Reviews until later in the term, so as to allow a more holistic and forward looking discussion of student progress once term has settled down;
- Heightened monitoring of pastoral contacts, to ensure that every student has at least one conversation with a member of the pastoral team each term which is followed up if necessary.

The Master noted that the government's lockdown review in mid-February will influence what happens in the HE sector from that point.

b) Foundation Year programme update

The Senior Tutor updated Council with the information that the College has been confirmed as a participant in the first year of this programme (2022-23). The number of Foundation Year students that the College will take on in this first cohort will be four, instead of the originally proposed five. There is a first meeting of the steering group next week.

(i) Memorandum of Understanding (CC.210127.2.2bi)

Council approved the Memorandum of Understanding and authorised the Master to sign on behalf of the College.

c) *Annual Music Report (CC.210127.2.2c)

Council noted the report.

2.3 Bursarial Business

a) Student Accommodation and Catering charges

(i) Student charges for Lent term 2021 (CC210127.2.3ai)

The Bursar summarised the arrangements for student charges over the Lent term, noting that catering charges for all students have been suspended for Lent Term, and that any students not in residence during the period of national lockdown will not be liable for rent. She noted that the wording of the statement had been amended in consultation with student representatives following feedback of some potential mis-interpretation and that overall her understanding was that following the clarification, the approach taken by College had been well received. The JCR President stated that he was appreciative of the work done by the College to mediate student concerns in respect of this matter.

(ii) Student charges: Proposals for 2021-22 (CC.210127.2.3aii)

This item was removed and will be brought back to Council at the next meeting on 24 February 2021.

b) COVID update: operational and financial

The Bursar provided an update on the current COVID situation in College. There has been only one positive student case to date, and the individual concerned is in isolation. There have been no positive student cases identified through the pooled asymptomatic testing programme this term. There have also been no positive cases recorded among College staff or Fellows.

Cromwell Court has been closed and the students who were accommodated there have been moved for operational and pastoral reasons.

In total just under 30% of student College accommodation is currently occupied. Reflecting the lower levels of students in residence, the majority of the key operational teams such as catering and accommodation are working on a flexible furlough basis with one week on and two weeks off. The majority of administrative staff and Fellows are working off site, with only a few Fellows or members of staff coming in where there is a need to do so; this is being agreed on a case by case basis by prior agreement.

There has recently been an extension of the symptoms in respect of which staff and students can request symptomatic testing through the University. The University has also launched a pilot of lateral flow tests for staff who are working a five day week on site. Plans for implementation within College are being worked through.

(i) Financial impact estimate of Lent term lockdown (CC.210127.2.3bi)

The Bursar highlighted that the Lent term lockdown was estimated to cause an additional £0.5M to be added to the College's forecast deficit for 2020-21, now forecast to be >£2M; this is primarily due to the loss of this terms' student rent and catering charges, and only partially offset by furlough payments. The College's commercial property tenants are struggling financially, and the additional lockdown is expected to put further pressure on commercial property income.

c) *COVID policies review summary (CC.210127.2.3c)

The changes to the College's COVID policies were **noted** by Council.

d) **Use of College Seal

- (i) 15-16 Sussex Street – Deed of Variation
- (ii) Darwin Green – Section 106 Deed of Variation

Council approved the specified uses of the College Seal.

2.4 Development Director

a) Development Director's Report (2020-21 Q2) (CC.210127.2.4a)

The report was received by Council. The Master expressed appreciation for the Development team's hard work in bringing in the donations received, particularly given the significant financial pressure the College is under.

2.5 Steward's Business

There was no Steward's business.

2.6 Student Business

a) JCR Report and Plans for Lent term (CC.210127.2.6a)

The JCR President spoke to the report. He said that the students had been pleased with the activities were able to take place during Michaelmas term, even though most had to go online. He reported that the JCR had spent a lot of money on welfare projects. A breakfast club was currently being run online to offer students an opportunity to socialise; there was also an online library meeting place and other online social events which had been arranged for the term. He wanted to thank the hard work of his predecessor, Mr Bryan, in helping set the foundation for this activity.

3. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

3.1 Kitchen Project Oversight Committee

a) Minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2020 (CC.210127.3.1a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

(i) Recommendation to name the new dining area as 'The Old Kitchen'

A member of Council asked if the person who had made a substantial donation to the kitchen project should be recognised or consulted in respect of the name. The Master explained that the donor concerned wished to remain anonymous and has expressly approved naming in recognition of another donor should that be appropriate. **Council approved** the proposed name for the new dining area.

3.2 *Finance & Needs Committee

a) Minutes of the meeting of 19 January 2021 (CC.210127.3.2a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

3.3 *Music Committee

a) Minutes of the meeting of 22 January 2021 (CC.210127.3.3a)

Council **noted** the minutes.

4. OTHER BUSINESS**4.1 Any other business**

The JCR President wanted to raise a number of concerns about student experience over the last academic year. He said that they were now entering the third term of online teaching and are likely to be experiencing a fourth for Easter Term. He wanted to emphasise the psychological impact of this on students who had felt isolated and/or had not had suitable conditions to study at home. He said that the JCR felt it was essential that the University recognised this. The JCR did not feel that students were adequately represented on the relevant University Committees and felt it was important that the College's senior management ensured that the students' views were communicated at the highest levels in the University.

The Senior Tutor recognised the impact on students and said it was not just the restrictions students had been under, but the duration of time these restrictions had lasted. He was very happy to communicate these concerns on the students' behalf through the Senior Tutors' Committee and other relevant inter-collegiate forums.

Both the Senior Tutor and Master flagged that there were some mental health initiatives currently taking place at University and inter-collegiate level, which would enable both Colleges and students to better understand and identify the state of students' mental health generally and for individual students to seek support where necessary. The Master also stated that the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education was committed to ensuring that there was no disadvantage to this year's undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts in terms of achievement outcomes, and was currently consulting on this.

The Vice-Master made the point that although the College shared the concerns voiced by the students, the University did need to address the issues with their departments and faculties, as the Colleges had limited ability to impact on them directly.

Council endorsed a mandate for the Master and Senior Tutor to pass on student concerns through the various inter-collegiate forums, in order that these forums could then pass on these concerns to the University.

4.2 Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 24 February 2021, following Governing Body meeting at 2pm.