



St John's College Junior Common Room

Minutes - Extraordinary General Meeting, Hilary Term 2021
Thursday 11th February, Zoom, 7:30pm

The meeting opened at 7:42 pm and was chaired by Zara Hussain (Chair), with minutes taken by Aoife Hegarty (Secretary).

Before the JCR Meeting opened, the hope was expressed that the discussion around motions brought at this meeting would be respectful, and that all students would think carefully about any comments. It was also noted that JSoc was a completely apolitical society.

1. Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Minutes were received.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

No matters were arising.

3a. Ratifications

LGBTQ+ Rep (1 vacancy to join Den de Barros)

Wilf Offord stood as LGBTQ+ Rep. They noted the importance of giving people a point of contact, especially during quarantine, and supporting the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. They also noted the current situation in the UK, mentioning the “roll-back on Trans rights” and that conversion therapy is still legal.

Wilf was **ratified nem. con.**

3b. Ratifications

c) The “Let's Create Societies” Constitutional Motion

No objections were heard.

The motion was **ratified nem. con.**

4. Agenda Items

a) The “Standing with our Jewish Community” Standing Policy Motion

Proposer: Emmet O’Leary, President

Seconded: Aoife Hegarty, Secretary

Zara Hussain (Chair) asked if there were any objections to Aoife Hegarty (Secretary) minuting this meeting, as they were seconding this motion. No objections were heard.

Emmet O’Leary (President) gave a short speech in favour of this motion. Emmet said that they would not speak for too long, because they had already written a long motion including the draft statement. They wanted to be clear on why we were meeting this evening. They noted that all EGMs are the result of unforeseen events between ordinary JCR meetings. The initial event which sparked this EGM was the invitation of Ken Loach, a prominent left-wing filmmaker, to speak at an event at St Peter’s College. Considerable concerns were raised by members of the Jewish community at St Peter’s and beyond, at the issuing of this invitation because of harmful comments which Ken Loach has previously made regarding Jewish people and the nation of Israel. Emmet then noted that this motion was not really about this invitation, and was rather about events which had occurred in the days since and the antisemitism which has since come to light in Oxford. Without the protection of their colleges, Jewish students were left vulnerable to verbally abusive and hurtful comments online and in person. Emmet said that this highlights the harm which can be done when “you don’t have a big organisation sticking up for you” and when students are not given the protection which is needed and deserved. Emmet noted that examples of antisemitic comments were available in Appendix 3, and cautioned that this Appendix “does not make for nice reading”. Emmet said that this motion aimed to create a “positive conclusion” to show that “we are standing up for the Jewish community”, and want to defend and protect the Jewish community from this awful rhetoric. Emmet noted that this incident happened just two weeks after Holocaust Memorial Day. One of the resolutions of this motion would mandate the E&D Officer to organise Antisemitism Awareness Training. Emmet noted that antisemitism is often disguised as political criticism. This motion was about attacks on the Jewish community; this was not a political issue but a Human Rights issue.

Zara Hussain (Chair) asked if there were any short questions.

No short questions were heard.

Zara asked if there were any items for discussion.

Naomi Reiter (Equality and Diversity Officer) reported that the Antisemitism Awareness Training was 1hr 45 mins long and had been organised by the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), “which is like the UK wide JSoc”. The training is about antisemitism, how to recognise it and how to combat it. It has already been offered to the SU Officers and they have enjoyed it. It is free. Naomi has already been in contact with UJS about this training.

Jake Hatton (Academic Affairs Officer) asked about some comments which had been made in Appendix 3, which had been labelled as “a collection of hateful comments”. Jake said that

some comments seemed to pointedly not criticise Jews as a whole but point specifically to Israel and its actions specifically. Jake said that these comments appeared to “have been lumped in with” the other very hateful and antisemitic comments. Jake wanted to be sure that this distinction would continue to be made but commented that everyone appeared to be “on the same page”.

Georgie Bumpus said that this distinction was definitely being made. They said that context in which these comments had been made must be recognised, and that the post which had been commented on (Appendix 2) had not made any claims about Israel and was specifically about one event. Georgie said that the post had said “we are concerned that the Master of St Peter’s would think it appropriate to run this event without contacting Jewish students”, and had not referenced Israel or Palestine at all. These comments were inappropriate because JSoc is “not an Israel-Palestine society, but a Jewish society”. Georgie noted that JSoc is neither a Zionist or anti-Zionist society with members in both and neither group, and that JSoc had been making a statement about the feelings of Jewish students.

Noam Rosenbaum (Suspended Students Rep) said that, as with all forms of discrimination, the context of the language that we engage with is the entirety of the meaning of that language. The context of what people are discussing and what they are intending is crucial to how we should interpret comments. Noam gave an example. They said that they are a Jew, not by religion but by cultural heritage, by history, by family and by tradition and that this was a very intrinsic part of their identity. They are also thoroughly opposed to the Israeli government. However, Noam said that when discussing antisemitism they should not be forced to preface their views on antisemitism with a defence, saying “don’t look at me, I am not Israel”. Noam said the consistent questioning or debate over “little bits of rhetoric” that related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict forced Jews into this defense. Jewish people are forced to come across as neutral or impartial, where what is really relevant is hate speech and the hateful and offensive parallels which, for example, are drawn between the Holocaust and the actions of Jews. Noam said that anyone could draw any parallels which they liked, though they may be very offensive. One nation is not one religion, and no nation in the world stands for one religion nor should the members of any one religion be considered responsible for the actions of one nation. Noam said that they did not intend to lecture, but wanted to highlight the context in which the comments in Appendix 3 had been made. In this context, these statements served only to further harmful and antisemitic tropes. Noam noted that these statements were particularly upsetting, as the comments used the same antisemitic stereotyping and rhetoric with which Jewish children are attacked from the youngest age in school and throughout their lives.

Emmet O’Leary wanted to make two points. Firstly, Emmet said that the Appendices do inform the motion but that we were not directly voting on the Appendices. Rather, the Appendices served to paint a picture of the antisemitism with which Jewish students were faced and which has been brought to light by this incident. Secondly, Emmet noted the wording of the draft statement (Appendix 5). If this motion was accepted, the JCR would offer their solidarity to Jews throughout the world, many of whom live many thousands of kilometers away from Israel.

Naomi Reiter noted that their father had been born in Israel and had renounced Israeli citizenship. Naomi said that their father actively challenged websites which called them Israeli, but is still called a Zionist and Israeli. Naomi said that antisemites “see a Jew and see Israel”, and find this an easy way to “cover their tracks” even as they criticise Israel in a way in which they would not criticise any other nation.

The motion passes **40 in favour 2 against 1 abstain**

5. Any Other Business

Alex Foster (Welfare Officer) thanked everyone who had shared their experiences in this JCR meeting, and asked when the next Ordinary General Meeting would be held.

Aoife Hegarty said that the next meeting would be held on the 21st of February.

Zara Hussain noted that this date left Sunday February 14th free from any JCR meeting.

Alex noted that people might have plans for Valentine’s Day.

Emmet O’Leary said that an IT Officer would be well placed to help the Secretary plan for JCR meetings on the JCR website, and encouraged JCR members to run for this position.