

Captains' Meeting Minutes

Thursday 4th Week Trinity Term 2024

7.00pm, 16th May

Doctorow Hall, St Edmund Hall

Chair: Tobias Bernard (OUBC)

Attendance (voting members):

College Clubs: 51

OURCs Committee: 5

Absences: Lincoln, Regent's, Trinity

1. Welcome

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Available at <https://ourcs.co.uk/organisation/meetings/>

No objections:

Minutes ratified.

3. Matters Arising

No matters arising

4. Report from COUR on changes to the OURCs Code of Conduct – Samuel McLoughlin to speak

A letter [Appendix A] from the Chair of COUR to Godstow Clubs was read out. A response [Appendix B] was read out by a representative of the Godstow clubs.

An OURCs committee member stressed that the OURCs Senior Member, and Chair of COUR for 2024, was not present to respond and purposefully kept themselves somewhat removed from the day-to-day running of OURCs, acting as a 'court of last appeal' and a 'bridge between OURCs and COUR'.

5. Rowing Sabbatical Officer's Election – Samuel McLoughlin to speak

- Oscar Hayden (Balliol)

Nominated: Sophie Winter (Balliol)

Seconded: Markus Baumgartner (Balliol)

Votes for: 53,
RON: 1,
Abstentions: 2,
Oscar Hayden elected.

6. **Transfers under A1.2.** – Samuel McLoughlin to speak

Under A.1.2.a.:

Objections may only be based on the following:

- *Athlete is not a member of the college they are transferring from*
 - *Athlete has never been a member of the college they are transferring to*
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- Francis Bertschinger, Magdalen to Jesus
 - Joe Gellet, St Peter's to St Anne's
 - Reja Wyss, St Catherine's to St Antony's
 - Rebekka Geremew Mankeshe, Linacre to St Edmund Hall
 - Dylan Dissanayake, Green Templeton to University
 - Sophie Harbord, Wolfson to Worcester

No objections:

Transfers stand as announced.

7. **Retention of Student Status (A1.1.a.i.1.a.)** – Samuel McLoughlin to speak

Simple majority to pass

It was stressed that the rule allowing suspended students to retain their student status, A1.1.a.i.1.a., was only for use in 'extraordinary circumstances' and requires the written approval of the college's Senior Tutor.

a. Robert Ferritto (Green Templeton):

We are applying to the captains to allow Robert Ferritto to retain his student status for Summer Vllls 2024. Robert has had to suspend his studies for mental health reasons following unforeseen events arising this Spring in his DPhil project. Robert has been involved with GTC for multiple years, including as captain during the Covid-19 pandemic. He is currently GTC's welfare officer. Rowing has been a constant source of wellbeing for Robert and we would be sorry for him to miss out on rowing during this difficult period. Robert is rowing in our M1 boat in division 3, and we already have three associate members (all partners of GTC students) filling our associate member spots in the lower boats. As such, we cannot simply have him row in our M2 as an associate member without causing prejudice to other committed members of our club. Rob is not a Blues or international rower.

We believe his case to be exceptional and to warrant such retention of student status. We have obtained written approval of the GTC's Senior Tutor to this effect.

Thank you.

Proposed: Arnaud Hamelin-Lachapelle (Green Templeton)

Seconded: François Barres (Green Templeton)

It was stressed that, while there were currently issues with the precise status of Robert's DPhil, he would once again be a full student member of Green Templeton come Michaelmas Term.

Votes for: 49,

Votes against: 0,

Abstentions: 7,

Motion passed.

b. Toby Bonvoisin (Green Templeton):

We are applying to the captains to allow Toby Bonvoisin to retain his student status for Summer Vllls 2024. Toby has suspended his studies in order to take a temporary role on an important national public inquiry that's highly relevant to his studies and which will directly inform his thesis. Toby has been involved with GTC for a few years and he has always enjoyed taking part in rowing. Toby would row in our M3 boat in division 7. Toby is not a Blues or international rower.

We believe his case to be exceptional and to warrant such retention of student status. The GTC's Senior Tutor has been supportive of Toby and we are in the process of obtaining written approval of the GTC's Senior Tutor to this effect.

Thank you.

Proposed: Arnaud Hamelin-Lachapelle (Green Templeton)

Seconded: François Barres (Green Templeton)

The proposers explained that Toby's area of expertise was epidemiology and that he had been contacted by the UK Covid-19 Inquiry and asked to contribute. They believed he should not be punished for what they felt was ultimately a contribution to the 'public good'.

No questions,

Votes for: 51,

Votes against: 0,

Abstentions: 5,

Motion passed.

c. Harry Hutchinson (St Hilda's):

Harry is a cox and rower who rusticated towards the end of Hilary following the death of an immediate family member. He is very involved in the boat club, currently serving as our co-president, and as such the boat club forms a critical part of his wellbeing network. This term Harry would likely have been coxing M1 as well as rowing in M2 and we would love to be able to continue to offer him the opportunity of being as actively involved in the boat club as possible given its importance in his life. We wouldn't gain any huge

competitive advantage from this as Harry is only a novice cox, having begun properly in TT23.

Proposed: Jack Davies (St Hilda's)

Seconded: Georgia Sweeney (St Hilda's)

The captains were informed that, while Harry was not felt to be an exceptionally experienced cox, St Hilda's were very limited in the number of coxes they had available and this motion was therefore, to a significant extent, an attempt to solve a coxing shortage for Summer Eights.

No questions,

Votes for: 49,

Votes against: 0,

Abstentions: 7,

Motion passed.

8. **Associate Rowers in Vills 2024 Senior Divisions under A3.6.a.iv.** – Samuel McLoughlin to speak
Simple majority to pass

a. **Eimear Conroy, Christ Church W2**

Eimear rowed with us in W2 last year. We are bringing this motion to have her row with our W2 this year (10th in Division 3), which is our lowest women's boat. Due to the unusually high position of our W2, in senior divisions, and the lack of river time novices have had this year, we are not confident that they will be able to compete safely in division 3. Therefore, we ask that Eimear be allowed to row as an associate.

Proposed: India Marsden (Christ Church)

Seconded: Benjamin Joseph (Christ Church)

This motion was withdrawn. With increased river time since the motion had initially been submitted, the proposers were now confident that their crew was safe to race, even without the addition of an associate.

b. **Maximilien Tirard, Lady Margaret Hall O1**

LMH O1 would like permission for Max Tirard to cox as an associate at summer eights. He completed his degree in Trinity last year, and was a rower during his time as a full member. Due to the flags we have had great difficulty in both training and attracting new coxes to the club, and Max has taken on coxing to help us. We would like to stress that at LMH we have no other available coxes, and without permission for Max to cox it is highly unlikely we will be able to race at all. He is an N status cox, so we do not feel this will provide us an unfair advantage.

Proposed: Fergus Carrington (Lady Margaret Hall)

Seconded: Abi Cooper (Lady Margaret Hall)

No questions,

Votes for: 49,

Votes against: 0,
Abstentions: 7,
Motion passed.

9. AOB

- **Update on fines money** – James Hopkinson to speak

The OURCs Treasurer explained that a meeting with OUBC to discuss the use of OURCs fines money now that OULRC no longer existed was planned. Unfortunately OUBC had been busy with the Boat Race and OURCs was now busy with Summer Eights, meaning the meeting had yet to happen. However, it was stressed that there were various ideas of how the money might be spent and OURCs keeping it for itself was very much not one of them.

- **MNR bids reminder** – Qianyi Sun to speak

Captains were reminded that the bidding process to run next year's Michaelmas Novice Regatta was open until the 7th June. OURCs loan the equipment required for running the race and cover any reasonable losses incurred due to cancellation. The event should even see the organisers turn a small profit.

- **Summer Eights reminders** – Sophia Ungermann to speak

It was stressed that OURCs were receiving a large volume of emails and were attempting to answer them all, but prioritising the most urgent. Captains were informed that at least two men's crews and one women's crew would fail to Row On, though others may be excluded on safety grounds.

- **Swimming on the last day of Eights**

1. It's banned by the EA Harbourmaster's notice, until 7:15pm on Saturday;
2. The river may well be full of excrement, and it's not always possible to tell by mere smell;
3. Last year the last division took considerably longer to close (and reopen the river) than it should as a direct result of (drunken) people jumping and throwing one another in repeatedly. This led to the SU being unable to close the event and let everyone go home, which kept marshals at their post much longer than they ought to be there on bumps dinner night, and caused problems for other river traffic.

Appendix A

From: Paul Azzopardi (Chair, Council for Oxford University Rowing 2024)

To: Senior Members of College Boat Clubs of, and Bursars of, New College, Pembroke College, St John's College and Wadham College.

Copied to: Senior Members of College Boat Clubs of, and Bursars of, Brasenose College, Keble College, Merton College, St Hughs College, and Trinity College.

Copied to: Members of COUR, David Seale (Bursar, Linacre College, Senior Treasurer OURCs, and Bursars' Representative on Sports Strategy Sub Committee), Mark Blandford-Baker (Domestic Bursar, St Edmund Hall, former member of COUR as British Rowing representative 2001-2021).

Dear All,

Oxford University Rowing Clubs (OURCs) Code of Conduct: Godstow Flag

Thank you for your jointly-signed letter addressed to the Director of University Sport received on 9th May 2024, which he has passed on to me.

OURCs have operated a river status flag at Godstow for over 20 years under rules defined in the OURCs Code of Conduct. It was necessary to review the rules for setting the status flag this year because reference to bucks (sluice gates) at Osney Lock, which used to be taken as an objective indicator of the flow of the stream on the Godstow reach, became obsolete due to the installation of a hydroelectric turbine at Osney Lock, which meant that sight of the weir gates was obscured and their settings may no longer be a reliable indicator of flow. The OURCs Committee proposed an amendment to the Code of Conduct that was put to the College Boat Club Captains at the OURCs Captains' meeting on Thursday of Week 1, and rejected by vote.

When this was reported at the termly meeting of the Council for Oxford University Rowing (COUR, which reports to the Sports Strategy Sub-Committee of the University Education Committee) on Friday of First Week of Trinity Term (26th April) 2024, it became evident that neither the original rules nor the proposed amendment were workable because they referred to a role for the boatman of St Edwards' School (SES) to which the new boatman had not consented.

In the absence of workable rules, the status flag defaults to the EA red boards.

Recognising that this would be overly restrictive in the short period leading up to Summer Eights, I therefore asked OURCs, in my capacity as Chair of COUR, to propose a workable solution. Their proposal did not come out of thin air but involved consultation with experienced members of the University rowing community, the Environment Agency, and the University Sports Department, and included a site visit by the University Sports Safety Officer, and an in-person meeting between the University Sports Safety Officer and the SES boatman.

The temporary solution, which I approved under Chairman's action, was to make provision for crews to take to the water with *experienced* coxes under 'low' red board (as they had been able to in the past when the previous SES boatman changed the flag for

OURCs himself), thereby relaxing the restriction *with the minimum possible delay*. Without this intervention no change would have occurred before the next COUR meeting in Michaelmas Term 2024.

Here is a visualization of the current rules compared to previous ones, from which it should be evident that the new categories are less restrictive than any that have applied before:

Old Godstow flag (under Phil C)	EA boards	SES flag 2024	New Godstow flag
Red	Red (high)	Red	Red
Amber	Red (low)	Amber-red	Amber
Amber	Yellow (high)	Amber	Blue
Green	Yellow (low)	Amber	Blue
Green	none	Green	Green

Some of you have asked whether the Godstow status flag could be set to Grey, but that option was explicitly ruled out by the full meeting of COUR, and I am not in a position to overturn it.

If a more workable, long-term solution can be found, then of course, it would be very welcome, but it is up to OURCs to formulate proposal that has the backing of COUR before it is voted through into the rules at a Captains' Meeting.

The Godstow status flag has now changed down and given the weather forecast, it is unlikely there will any need for more restrictive flags on the Isis or at Godstow until after Summer Eights. I hope this will allow time for feelings to calm down and for an acceptable long-term solution to be found.

As Bursars and Senior Members of Boat Clubs, you should understand the bigger picture. The worst thing that could happen is that a student loses their life while engaged in rowing. The last time this happened, in 2000, two inquests were held, and individual members of the boat club concerned (including the Senior Member), OURCs, the University, and the Amateur Rowing Association were under serious threat of legal liability and prosecution (to the extent of being cross-examined under oath in court).

At the conclusion of the second inquest in 2006, H.M. Coroner wrote to the University under Rule 43:

“A Coroner who believes that action should be taken to prevent the recurrence of fatalities similar to that in respect of which the inquest is being held may announce at the inquest that he is reporting the matter in writing to the person or authority who may have power to take such action and he may report the matter accordingly”.

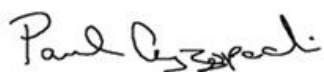
COUR was established explicitly to respond to the immediate fallout from the tragedy, and to address formally the concerns raised by the Coroner, so as to ensure that rowing is conducted as safely as possible – as directed by the Coroner - while at the same time minimising restrictions on its enjoyment as a sport and as part of traditional University culture. Given that there are approximately 2,500 students engaged in rowing in the University, the vast majority of whom are completely new to the sport, the risks are relatively high. There is a delicate balance between safety and utility, not just in the present, but with implications for the future of rowing in the University were there to be another serious incident.

Another death is a tragedy that we all wish to avoid, but if it were to happen then every decision, every policy, every role, every aspect of the institution and of individuals' behaviour will be dissected under a microscope by the police, lawyers, and insurance companies. I should not have to explain how that might play out.

I hope this helps you to understand why things stand as they do. In case you have further questions, it might be worth organising a meeting for Senior Members of College Boat Clubs and College Bursars at a suitable time to explain more about the context and constraints under which rowing safety is managed.

One final point. I understand that OURCs Officials - who are only student volunteers elected by the College Boat Club Captains to help the organisation run rowing safely and to organise inter-collegiate races – are being subjected to unpleasant and explicit abuse on social media. In a bid to reduce the nastiness that the committee were receiving the announcement of COUR's ruling was accompanied by a reminder of the Proctors' policy on harassment and that it applies to all students, but I am afraid the abuse continues. You would hope that it is not being perpetrated by members of your College Boat Clubs.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Azzopardi". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul Azzopardi

Chair, Council for Oxford University Rowing (2024)
Dean, and Tutor in Psychology, Worcester College, Oxford.

Appendix B

Statement from the Presidents of the clubs training at Godstow and the COUR Captain's Representative

Firstly, we would like to say that we are very grateful to the captains for their near-unanimous rejection of the proposed changes to the flag system in the last meeting, and their support of the clubs that would have been directly affected by this change.

The changes to the code of conduct regarding the Godstow flag have been forced through unilaterally by the chairman of COUR, without the consent of the rest of COUR. The chairman of COUR holds this position as he is the OURCs senior member, as appointed by the OURCs committee. At 11:30am on Friday of 2nd Week everyone on COUR, including the elected captain's representative, received an email from the senior member stating these changes were to be forced through via chairman's action. The chairman did not attempt to obtain delegated authority to act in this unilateral manner in the COUR meeting preceding their actions. In justifying the urgency of taking this action, they referenced the need for crews to be able to boat on the stretch before eights, as the system was reliant on Osney Lock's bucks which are now unreadable due to the hydroelectric power plant. In fact, this was built around 10 years ago. At the last meeting of COUR, the chairman said it was up to OURCs to come up with a flag system more palatable to the captains, and suggested that a grey flag was a possibility as long as it were approved by the college bursars - all of the bursars we have spoken to so far are either indifferent or supportive of a grey flag.

A 5pm deadline was set by the chairman for any objections to this executive action on safety grounds. Multiple members of COUR responded with objections before this presented deadline. All were ignored and many were met with an out-of-office email. This is clear evidence that the chairman of COUR was, despite asking for them, uninterested in objections from the rest of the council. The Rowing Sabbatical Officer exclusively emailed the nine clubs boating from Godstow that evening to inform them that the changes were taking effect immediately.

In response, the Godstow clubs escalated this matter and wrote a 21 page letter to the University Director of Sport and sent it to the OURCs senior member and committee. This includes our objections to the new flag system, alternative proposals and risk assessments for a flag system including a grey flag, and evidence of how the 9 clubs have been repeatedly refused any input during the decision-making process over the last 6 months. We are happy to send this to any captain or club that requests it. It has been signed by all club presidents and captains. Multiple college bursars, who are responsible for safety and liability insurance, senior members, and senior coaches have signed it. Last night, COUR, our bursars and senior members received a response from the OURCs senior member which once again provides no framework for us to have any input. In particular, it was not addressed to the college presidents or captains. Additionally, the OURCs senior member has written that the new rules allow X status coxes on amber. This is false. He further claims that the new flag system is less restrictive than the one administered by the previous SES boatman, which is again false, as evidenced by the need to have an S status cox at Godstow until last week (when the stream conditions would have previously fallen under green flag). This shows that the OURCs senior member does not fully understand the system he has personally forced through.

We would like to engage in discussion with the new Rowing Sabbatical Officer, who we hope will take seriously their responsibility to represent the college clubs, about reversing this change following Summer Eights. As the captains can see, this new system is clearly unsuitable as there were multiple days last week when S status coxes only were allowed at Godstow, when it was Green on the Isis. With this current system, most Godstow clubs are planning to leave the stretch next winter as it will become financially unviable to keep boats there, which defeats the point of this new flag system entirely. Beyond this, we are exploring what other options are available to the assembled captains to ensure our clubs' voices, as expressed by the near-unanimous vote at the last meeting, are heard and respected.

Throughout the last few weeks it has become clear that the institutional structures and procedures surrounding intercollegiate rowing at Oxford University require some attention and we would be grateful to hear the experiences, viewpoints and opinions from the college boat clubs in regards to this, please do reach out to one of us, anonymously or otherwise. Though we are in the middle of exam season and about to race summer eights, we will endeavour to have as active a dialogue as possible with all the clubs affiliated to OURCs, because whilst the underlying issue in this specific instance is directly relevant to only some, the precedents set should be worrying to all clubs.