

# Oxford SU Taskforces

## Terms of Reference

### 1. Vision

Throughout the transformation period, it is key that we keep students engaged and involved. By maintaining a network that cuts across the student body and involved student leaders, we can make sure to both quickly disseminate and gather information from the student body.

Moreover, this approach transcends standard student engagement since it involves students in the work on policy development and advocacy, bringing them in the room, exposing them to the complexities of Oxford, and having them form informed opinions as a result.

Thus, the taskforces can be not only essential for the involvement and engagement of student stakeholders in the SU transformation process, but also a useful pilot for one way in which we can empower representation in the future.

In particular, the desired benefits of the taskforces are:

- It would make the SU more relevant. It would directly increase engagement in the SU as far more students would be working within the SU structures.
- It would solve the information asymmetry problem inherent in student representation right now - as we would have insight from students who would be promoting the issues important for them, and they would have insight into how Oxford representation works.
- It would support the time pressured Sabbatical Officers so they can focus directly on proactive policy proposals, increasing their ability to engage students.
- It would increase the quantity and quality of proposals and committee interventions as far more students would be involved. Therefore, the SU would be more effective at committee representation or proactive policy work.
- It would create a process for getting student leaders trained on how SU and University representation works, which will widen the pool of election candidates with direct exposure to sabbatical duties and conduct.

The aim is not for the taskforces to be a decision-making space. Instead, their primary scope is consultation.

For the most part this means Ideas, committee proposals, and policy proposals can be shared with the network of student stakeholders to efficiently hear their opinion before deciding whether to pursue further consultation and insight work or other courses of action. This also means information can travel upwards to the sabbatical officers through the network – it grounds us within the student body.

A secondary aim is executive function – taskforce members can opt in to work on research report or policy development more directly beyond the ordinary taskforce meetings, or with committee representation in the exceptional circumstances in which further student involvement is needed – in which case they would always be attending in addition to a sabbatical officer and would receive the support of the entire taskforce.

### 2. Scope

For this year we would convene three taskforces, each chaired by a sabbatical officer.

*The Undergraduate Taskforce* will be chaired by the VP UG Education and Access, and will focus on emerging issues from undergraduate students, in particular when it relates to education policy and academic representation that affects the undergraduate student body – such as college provisions, freshers assistance, and examination regulation.

*The Postgraduate Taskforce* will be chaired by the VP PG Education and Access, and will similarly focus on emerging issues from postgraduate students, in particular when it relates to education policy and academic representation that affects the postgraduate student body – such as departmental support, graduate accommodation, part-time work, and research processes.

*The Transformation Taskforce* will be chaired by the President, and will focus on the operations of the SU more broadly as well as serve as a general purposes committee looking at urgent or high-level issues that have cross-cutting impact – such as the transformation project.

Since the taskforces are not decision-making space, overlap and cooperation between them in the issues they examine is not a problem and should be encouraged – important issues would be consulted on and key information would be disseminated by all of them.

### **3. Composition and Recruitment**

An ideal taskforce would be of manageable size, with a dozen members being a good rule of thumb. The exact number can vary – additional insight and engagement are always useful, and over-recruiting can help with drop outs or schedule clashes that will be common during term. But its important to make sure the team size is manageable and that it feels like a cohesive team, and to include only engaged and committed members.

The aim for these taskforces is for them to be powerful networks that provide insight into the student body's views and makes high-level skills available for the SU. For that reason, the composition of the taskforces should follow two key principles:

1. The taskforces shall represent a diverse range of views and experiences within the confines of their purview. It's important to strive for a group that, even if not wholly and exactly representative of the student body's demographics, is inclusive and pluralistic, allows for various expressions, and is not particularly biased toward any demographic.
2. The taskforces' members shall only be past, current, or future student leaders. This is because it is most likely these can be overtly able to represent key stakeholder groups, have the experience and ambition to take part in this kind of work, and have the network to drive insight and engagement. This allows for a limited enough criterion to make sure the taskforces are not hijacked by rouge actors or members whose views are rare, but a wide enough criterion to include both current stakeholders, emerging leaders, and experienced students. In particular, the members who would qualify would for the most part be past, current, or future:
  - a. Sabbatical officers and SU office holders.
  - b. JCR, MCR, or GCR Presidents or key relevant committee members.
  - c. Divisional reps or prominent and active JCC/JGCC course reps.
  - d. SU Campaign co-chairs or executive committee members.
  - e. Society or Club Presidents or executive committee members.

Since the taskforces are not currently resting on a foundation that includes any democratic structure, they would not make decisions and memberships would be opt-in, with the aim of

including anyone who is willing to be an active and engaged member or who falls under (2) above, within the limits of the consideration (1).

Students who do not currently hold the offices described in (2) a-e could still participate if they aim to be elected to such a position in the future and the responsible sabbatical officer is convinced they have the equivalent network, influence, and ability to contribute.

These taskforces shall be complemented by an open-door policy for any student who wishes to get involved, and thus shall most definitely not be the only avenue to do so. Other students shall all be consulted on as much as possible and would also carry significant weight – through various opportunities that would be regularly rolled out, such as the all student meetings; surveys, focus groups, consultations, and other insight activities; direct communication with the sabbatical officers or change director; an engagement with taskforce members.

#### **4. Operation and Timeline**

The taskforces shall be a safe space for the expression, discussion, and debate of many opinions, and would to the most part not stick to a set of rigid structure or rules. However, it is key that discussion is guided and that insight from the taskforces is documented, and so that its meetings follow an agenda set by the sabbatical officer chair and are minutes – with particular attention to the composition of present members and identity of the stakeholder groups they represent.

The key resources that this would require would be (tbc) democracy assistant hours, budget for meeting provisions, sabbatical officer time, and communication resources (tbd).

A target timeline can be:

*July - August:* sabbatical officers meet key stakeholders and recruit members to the taskforces;

*Start of September:* sabbatical officers convene first call with the initial joiners. Can be utilized to launch qualitative insight gathering, in particular student testimonies, for the Disparities in Graduate Access Report or committee agenda items.

*Start of MT:* first in-person meeting of the taskforces, with additional members recruited over fresher's week; can be utilized to plan campaigning, engagement, and information spreading over the Report, collecting insight for committee representation, planning new projects for the term, or consulting over transformation plans.

*Henceforth:* meetings in mid and end of MT and three times a term in HT and TT 2025, pending evaluation over the Christmas vacation.