



Trinity Hall MCR
Committee Meeting
7.00pm, 18th January 2016
MCR Blue Room

1 Attendance

1.1 Present

Charlotte Attwood (CA, chair), Charles Board (CB), Philip Brown (PB), Madeline Grimm (MG), Xanthe Gilmore (XG), Will Miller (WM), Peppar Cyr (PC), Daniel Zimmerman (DZ), Mich Liebst (ML), Matt Samson (MS), Dan Bowen (DB), Rob Gard (RG), Victor Chu & Verity Smith (VC & VS, or Team V), Alina Kozlovski (AlKo), Chris Wilson (CW), Johan Hendrikson (JH), Spencer Brennan (SB),

1.2 Apologies

Gareth Matthey (GM), Jordan Hatter (JH), Isabel Estevez (IE), Allison Kindig (AlKi)

2 Quorum

Quorum is 50 % + 1 of the number of members of the MCR Committee. This correspond to 13 people; 18 were present, so quorum was reached.

3 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the Committee meeting on 30th November 2015 were voted on.

Vote: For: 16. Against: 0. Abstained: 2 (members absent at this time). Minutes passed.

4 Matters arising

4.1 Changes in Committee membership

CA raised two changes in MCR Committee membership. Nard Choi has resigned from the Committee, citing a clash with other commitments. Kim Harrisberg is keen to join as Women's Officer, to assist ML. The procedure for a second officer to join an existing position midway through the year is a little nebulous - the Constitution only explicitly covers appointment of an MCR member to a role which is currently unoccupied. The procedure usually is observed is for the President to appoint the new Committee member, pending ratification at the next Open Meeting. That procedure will be followed this time; Kim Harrisberg's request to join as Women's Officer was approved pending support at the February Open Meeting.

Action: Nard Choi has left the Committee. Kim Harrisberg's request to join ML as Women's Officer will be put to a vote at the next Open Meeting.

4.2 Protocol for dinners

CA drew attention to the current confusion over Burns Night Dinner regarding booking opening times. Booking for guests had opened at the same time as for MCR members, leading to many members being unable to procure a ticket. In addition there was some confusion over the dress code, as this is a Wednesday dinner. This confusion may be due to a lack of firm protocol on the issue - these dinners happen every year, and are essentially the same, so perhaps a protocol for each one should be established.

XG expanded on the idea of a protocol. For each black tie dinner, it should cover when booking opens for MCR members and for guests, how many people can book (usually dictated by whether the dinner is on a Wednesday or a Friday), the dress code (black tie, fancy dress), whether a seating plan is used, and whether MCR members can bring their own wine, or if wine is purchased from College.

A general discussion ensued on a few of the aspects of this protocol. XG stated that in general people seemed more keen for bring your own (BYO) wine, rather than wine provided by College at around £10 per person. BYO is more flexible (you can choose the wine you get and the money you spend), it allows more control of your drinking (you can share a single bottle with a friend if you want, rather than continually having your glass topped up), and it prevents people being priced out of black tie dinners, which approach £30 with wine. There was general assent.

The issue of seating plans was hotly debated. XG and CA were in general opposed to the use of a seating plan. They add a significant organisational effort on the part of the Stewards and the Computing Officer, and an additional frantic rush to book seats the second they open, which can unfairly penalise some MCR members who e.g. can't continually watch a website page at midday because they have to do actual work. However, CB, MS and Pauline Kiesow (PK) were in general in favour of a seating plan for all black tie dinners. MS stated that this issue had been discussed last year. It was felt that the role of the seating plan was to allow people to enjoy pre-dinner drinks without having to leave early in an attempt to procure a seat with friends. This makes pre-dinner drinks much more enjoyable without a constant need to be ready to leave. PK added that this had been a bit of a problem at the Harry Potter Super Hall.

PB suggested this could be raised at the next Open Meeting. CA reluctantly agreed.

PK asked how we should deal with guests (such as the Master) in the absence of College wine being provided. RG stated that this had been done last year - typically 1-2 bottles of £10-£15 wine would be purchased for them.

XG asked about policy on gowns. CA explained the general rule: gowns at Grad Halls on Wednesday, but not at anything else unless explicitly required.

Action: *Clear protocol on the various aspects of black tie dinners to be added to Internal Ents handover notes. The issue of seating plans and BYO to be raised at the next Open Meeting.*

4.3 Committee reports

DB has been involved in the general smooth running of the Exec, helped to buy alcohol, and attended the recent CUSU Conference. The Conference had some interesting talks, but there's no need to discuss it with the whole Committee.

PB has also attended CUSU Conference, in between delivering on his manifesto promises. An Archive page has been added to the MCR website (behind a Raven login), containing documents such as the Fresher's Week poster and the MCR's position statements on rent and street lighting. This should both help to improve the MCR Committee's transparency (the wider MCR can see what we've written on their behalf), and preserve these documents for the use of future Committees. In addition, as agreed at the last Committee Meeting, meeting minutes will now be posted on a web page open to the wider internet (and hence to Google etc.), as well as being uploaded as a .pdf. PB rather optimistically suggested that the easiest way to do this would be just to remove Raven protection from the current minutes system. The tender, juicy prey of this idea was immediately torn to shreds by a rabid dog pack composed of CB, CA and many others. They argued that those minutes had been uploaded on the understanding they would be private, and we should not retroactively expose them. PB reluctantly agreed to make a new web page system to upload public minutes to.

WM and XG stated that Internal Ents had been up to their usual tricks. Super Hall themes had been decided on, and a busy termcard for Lent organised. They are looking at music for the Garden Party and Annual Dinner; one act has already been booked. WM raised the possibility of having a Trinity Hall singer perform at the Garden Party; this was generally felt to be a good idea. Internal Ents will discuss this with the JCR, who are perhaps more likely to be able to provide acts. Internal Ents are also looking for a DJ to perform after this term's Super Hall. XG added that, as well as working to organise these events, she had been involved in liaising with the Conference Office over issues with Burns Night Dinner booking. Apparently this had been a complex task, but hopefully everything was sorted now. MS suggested that often the easiest way to get results was to go in person to the Conference Officer.

ML has had a meeting with the Master regarding events celebrating the 40th anniversary of women being admitted to Trinity Hall. College are in general keen to do a small number of large events, working primarily with alumni. There was disappointingly little interaction planned with the MCR; likely we could provide a few guests to a large dinner event. To make up for this, ML suggested expanding the Women in Academia event run by the MCR, in particular making this a lunchtime event and trying to improve attendance. This was generally agreed to be a good idea, pending budgetary approval.

Fiscal overlord CB stated that the accounts had finally been submitted to College, for the first time in six years - thanks to Tobias Wenzel for all his work on this. As a reward College has just paid us £12,000, so an MCR Committee Holiday to e.g. Spain or Italy is now feasible. CB is in the process of sorting the budget for this year; most Committee roles have now submitted requests, but a few are still outstanding.

MG and RG have been involved in sorting details for the upcoming Burns Night dinner, e.g. procuring whisky.

MS and SB have been working on securing a high-quality speaker for the Annual Dinner, as well as taking over running of the Vice Vivam award, and starting the initiative of interviewing MCR members in a range of subjects to post on the website. MS also mentioned that MCR members should consider taking part in the Alumni Office's Calling Campaign. This will help College and improve the MCR rapport with alumni.

AlKo and CW have looked at running study groups at a range of different times. By far the most successful has been the one outside term time. They may look at discontinuing study groups during the term in favour of more over the holidays. They have also been working on organisation for the McLuhan Symposium, and attempting to run a 'Meet the Postdocs' event, though this is reliant on the postdocs responding.

JH has initiated a few events. Firstly, the Green New Year's Resolutions on the MCR noticeboard has a few resolutions, though not all of them are green. There are plans for a Sustainable Bakeoff, likely in early February. In addition, to maintain Fair Trade status the MCR needs to run a few Fair Trade events. One of these could be a film night, for which a small budget of £50 was requested. CB stated that he could likely relinquish his iron grip on the MCR's funds for this.

PC had been involved in running Welfare Tea, and thanked XG for doing the dishes, a sentiment echoed by the rest of the Committee. PC had also attended the CUSU Conference, adding that other colleges had commented on the good attendance and general likeability of the Trinity Hall MCR Committee delegates to the conference. PC was also planning a couple of talks this term, on topics such as impostor syndrome.

Team V had been busy. Construction on the MCR jacuzzi is likely to begin at the end of this month. Three swaps have been organised for this term, and two for next term. There will be a swap next term with University College in Oxford. MS asked Univ to please stop stealing our stuff; Team V explained that this year we'd be going to Oxford so would have a chance to indulge in some reciprocal larceny, a prospect met with general approval by the MCR Committee. In addition, Team V were looking at organising a trip to the Globe Theatre. There was a discussion over the merits of sitting vs. standing tickets. Finally, Team V suggested that, as they'd been running at a profit over the last year, and the MCR finances were generally good, we could consider the possibility of an MCR foreign trip, perhaps subsidised by the Committee. This was an intriguing idea, and it was generally felt a subsidy might be possible but further details of the trip would need to be established.

DZ has been involved in organising a Pembroke swap, and an LGBT+ film night. Attendance for the film night was rather low, so for future film nights it would be emphasised that all MCR members are welcome to attend, not just those identifying as LGBT+. February is LGBT+ History month, and some colleges will be raising the rainbow flag on the first day of the month. DZ had suggested this to Trinity Hall, but it may be difficult as College doesn't have a flag and would probably be reluctant to buy one.

CA has been involved in general presidential activity. The plan to get an MCR dishwasher has been torpedoed by College; we should be grateful for the opportunity to retain the community spirit and charitable attitude that washing other people's dishes by hand engenders. Many meetings have been had with a menagerie of College fellows. The discussions on accommodation will be elaborated on later.

4.4 CARA petition

Lilia Giugna presented a petition presented to the MCR and University regarding CARA, the Campaign for at-risk Academics, in the light of the ongoing Syrian crisis. Many students have been considering what they can do regarding the current crisis; the petition supporters felt that the most effective action would be to team up with an established charity. CARA is an existing charity which supports persecuted academics and provides support for them at British universities.

A petition in support of CARA in Cambridge has already been presented circulated on the MCR Facebook page. It approximately states that the University should recognise the importance of CARA, support CARA in Cambridge by allowing Cambridge to become an organisational hub for the charity, and host at-risk academics, providing financial support, housing etc. The petition is also encouraging students to crowdfund a single graduate student bursary, attempting to raise £30k to cover tuition fees.

Trinity Hall MCR was requested to sign the petition as an institution (this has already been done by Fitzwilliam and Magdelene colleges), encourage its members to sign as individuals, and support CARA fundraising efforts, e.g. allowing a donations box or a raffle at black-tie dinners. The text of the petition was read. There was general assent that fundraising on behalf of CARA could go ahead, and that this issue should be raised at the next Open Meeting where we could vote on whether the MCR should sign as an institution.

Debate ensued on whether the Trinity Hall MCR Committee should sign the petition as a Committee, then present the issue to the wider MCR. Some felt that the Committee could sign the petition without this binding the whole MCR to its support; others believed that providing a Committee signature would imply support of the MCR on an issue which hasn't yet been put to all the members, and thus be unrepresentative. The question of whether the MCR Committee should sign was put to a vote.

Vote: For: 7. Against: 7. Abstained: 1. Motion failed.

Action: CARA petition to go to next Open Meeting; MCR can vote to sign it there. Circulation on MCR pages looking for personal signatures, and fundraising efforts, approved.

4.5 Accommodation update

CA stated that the venerable Bateman Street accommodation will be retired from this September. The shortfall in graduate housing will be made up for by additional rooms for grads in Wychfield, primarily New Build. CA has already raised the issue of the obvious price differences (Bateman was among the cheapest MCR accommodation, New Build is the most expensive). College stated that they could increase the availability of bursaries to assist anyone struggling financially. CA would meet with the Junior Bursar in the next week, and raise these concerns regarding the rapid increase in cheap rooms (particularly with the pending 10 % rent rise next October for LF and WC).

DZ stated that College needed to make it much clearer about the availability of bursaries, to general agreement. Often the application process for bursaries is rather opaque, and many students are likely not aware of their existence. CA added that College thought the MCR takeup of available bursaries was rather low; more should be done to advertise these.

The discussion moved to the topic of rent banding, and having a range of differently-priced rooms. MS stated that the Bursary had previously suggested the MCR could have more of a role in setting rents, provided the total income for College remained the same. For example, we could suggest increasing the price of New Build but keeping LF and WC cheaper. PB added that this was a topic which had been mentioned at the recent CUSU Conference: while rent reductions are very unlikely, colleges in general are more likely to be open to allowing price differentiation so students with less money still have options for college accommodation. We should therefore make some efforts to protect this in Trinity Hall, which previously had done very well with a wide selection of prices, from cheap (but poor-quality) Bateman Street to very expensive (but excellent) New Build. Now there is a steady drift towards more and more expensive accommodation. In addition, the argument regarding bursaries is not entirely convincing, because it's very unlikely that the money given out in bursaries (of which the number provided will presumably be very small) will make up for all the additional income that will come from forcing more grads to live in New Build. The net result for the MCR is a dramatic increase in grad rental costs.

CA added that at the next Finance Committee meeting, the MCR was planning to propose the establishment of a more formal approach to rent setting by College, in light of the issues of the last two years. This would involve the Bursary presenting their proposal to the MCR well in advance of the meeting (e.g. one month), to allow the MCR to prepare a counter proposal. This would then be discussed at the Finance Committee.

DZ added that he had been asked by College to vacate his room for a long period to allow checking of electrical devices etc. CB replied that usually this process only takes an hour or so.

4.6 Budget discussions

CB introduced the topic of a budget for this year; presumably such a document would be desirable. While the final budget is still incomplete, the basic framework is outlined. It will likely be similar to last year's one, with a few minor changes.

DZ wanted money, and wanted to know what could be asked for. Copies of last year's budgeted and actual spending were passed around.

CA said that the MCR has some excess money after the bitter austerity of Tobias Wenzel's regime. What should be done with this money? CA's suggestion was subsidising either Grad Halls or Super Halls, as this was likely to reach the most members of the MCR. There was the usual extended debate about which to subsidise. The change to the Grad Hall subsidy would likely be around £1, while for Super Halls (because there are fewer of them) the subsidy could be higher. CB suggested that we should think about the purpose of the subsidy in the first place - is it to encourage attendance at dinners, or to make them cheaper? MS added that Grad Hall was considered by College to be an important focal point of MCR life, so increased attendance there would be beneficial. In addition, this is likely the best way to reach a lot of people. DZ added that Super Halls already sell out, so there seems no need to subsidise them. However, DB noted that if the subsidy were applied to Grad Hall, you would have to go to more dinners to get the same saving - in fact such a subsidy would end up costing you money. This caused a brief pause for reflection.

External Ents suggested that the money could go towards a single event; Super Halls are already fully booked (so there's no need to encourage attendance), and Grad Halls are already subsidised. We could potentially benefit more members of the MCR by running an event rather than slightly reducing the price of dinners. CB suggested that External Ents should think about such events and present more detailed plans to him.

CA noted that the JCR haven't been paid for MCR use of their societies. CB responded that they hadn't asked to be; CA suggested that this seemed rather unfair.

MS raised the issue of newspaper subscriptions. These have long been a significant fraction of the MCR's budget for seemingly little actual benefit to its members. CB stated that the number of newspapers provided by the MCR had been quite dramatically cut, but some were still being purchased, to the general disgust of PB. It was decided that we would continue the reduced newspaper purchase and see if anyone either complained or actually read them, pending further changes later in the year.

MS also raised the issue of GU subscriptions; CB replied that the GU hadn't asked for payment for the previous year. PB went on a long rant about the large number of issues the GU has been plagued with over the last few years, stating that we should not under any circumstances pay them any money whatsoever until there is convincing evidence they could be run effectively. CA and DB replied that while perhaps this was true, they had been bought a tasty free dinner by this year's GU President so perhaps things were being turned around.

CB stated that a few Committee roles had yet to submit budget requests; the budget could not be finalised until this was done.

Action: *All Committee roles to submit budget requests. CB to finalise this year's budget.*

5 Any other business

Mercifully there was no other business.

6 Date of next meeting

TBC. The Open Meeting will likely be Feb. 1st.