



TRINITY HALL M.C.R.

First Committee Meeting (Unofficial), Michaelmas 2023

12:00pm, 6th December 2023

Bridgetower Room

--- o ---

Present: Chair: Jake Bransgrove (President); Emily Shaw (Vice-President), Soham Kar (Treasurer), Benjamin Iago Gibson (Secretary), Martin Kirsch (External Ents Officer), Chris Haggard (MCR-JCR Rep), Angus Fotherby (Alumni Officer), Shaashwat Saraff (International Officer), Jannis Jakobs (Welfare and Disabilities Officer), Niamh Divers (Academic Officer), Thomas Frick (Academic Officer), Rob Wiseman (PDRA Rep), Noah Cadwaladr Evans (Steward).

Present on Zoom: Tiana Maria (Gender Officer), Michael Baker (Welfare and Disabilities Officer), Clara Kraebber (LGBTQ+ Officer).

Apologies received from: Laura Espinoza (Gender Officer), Constantin Schmidt (International Officer), Louisa Yapp (Internal Ents Officer), Grace Varnham (Computing Officer), Milly Parsons (Computing Officer).

--- o ---

Matters Arising:

- 1) **Declaration of conflicts of interest**
- 2) **Approval of minutes from previous meeting**
- 3) **New committee introductions and overview of roles**
 - i. Introductions and questions about roles
 - ii. Discussion of handover
 - iii. Committee responsibilities and dates
 - iv. Vacant roles
 - a. Presently-lacking Green and Ethical Advisor Officer
 - b. Additional Steward
 - c. Wider policy for deputising
- 4) **Priorities for the year ahead**
 - i. Rebuilding relationships
 - a. Postdoctoral mentoring

- ii. Moving into refurbished MCR
 - a. New MCR furnishings
 - b. Essential items for the new facility
 - 1. The Question of a Television
 - c. Moving-in party
 - iii. Archiving
 - 5) Communications**
 - i. MCR committee internal communications
 - ii. Circulation of agendas and minutes to the MCR
 - iii. MCR postgraduate WhatsApp chat
 - iv. Individual role emails
 - v. MCR website
 - a. Offer of engagement with College Comms. Department
 - 6) Calendar of events**
 - i. Planning for future social events
 - ii. Photographer for events
 - iii. Joint JCR/MCR formal on Thursdays.
 - a. Subject dinners
 - 7) Christmas presents for college staff**
 - 8) Open discussion**
 - i. Formation of college societies
 - ii. Concerns about UK government reform of visa law
 - 9) Organisation of future meetings and concluding remarks**
-

1) Declaration of conflicts of interest

None.

2) Approval of minutes of previous committee meeting

The minutes of the previous committee meeting (hustings) of 21st November 2023 were approved.

3) New committee introductions and overview of roles

- i. All convened, the President proposed going round the room, individual committee members introducing themselves and their positions, with a chance for members to ask questions to clarify their responsibilities and roles. This was done; no questions were raised.

- ii) The President raised the matter of handover from previous committee, asking who present had received handover documents from previous office-holders, of which a few were known to have been prepared; a scattered few hands were raised. The importance of ensuring a smooth transition by also contacting and getting living knowledge of the roles from past committee members was stressed, especially for those not in possession of handover documents.
- iii) The President issued a reminder of the college committees on which MCR committee members sit *ex officio*—it was emphasised how important participation in these committees is for maintaining healthy collaboration and communication with College. The President drew the gathering's attention to the list of college committees and associated committee members appended to the agenda, detailing which MCR officer was entitled to participate in each.
- iv)
 - a. The current lack of a Green and Ethical Affairs Officer on the MCR Committee was highlighted, with an accompanying call to all members to recruit a volunteer to fill the breach, if one could be found. The President did reassure, however, that at least the current JCR Green and Ethical Affairs Officer does a very good job representing student concerns on these subjects to College, and that the college committees and advisory panels on which the G.E.A. Officer sits do at least all have current MCR representation in the form of at least one other Committee member.
 - b. The President also raised concern about the fact that currently the office of Steward is only filled by one person, which might result in some strain on Cadwaladr Evans's part if he had to be present for every Wednesday formal to serve drinks. Cadwaladr Evans and Gibson leapt in to reassure that they'd already had an informal conversation about this problem, and Gibson was happy to act as an informal no. 2 in the role; to this there was general consent around the table. The President also offered his experienced services as a no. 3, if one were ever required. The Vice-President took the opportunity to remind all members to reach out to the wider Committee if they are ever unable to take on responsibility for an event, &c. within their purview, so that a suitable stand-in can be found.
 - c. Wiseman here enquired about the policy for deputising if an MCR Committee member ever found themselves unable to attend one of the college committees on which they were entitled to sit. The President affirmed the existing policy—to contact the Secretary, giving notice that you are unable to attend a given meeting, and nominating a suitable deputy from the MCR Committee. The Vice-President once again stressed the importance of having at least one person to represent of the MCR present on all these committees, to ensure smooth collaboration and representation in College affairs.

4) Priorities for the year ahead

- i. The President emphasised the no. 1 priority in the coming year for the MCR as being rebuilding relationships with college officers, many of which have lapsed in the year just gone; a real need to demonstrate to College that the MCR Committee intends to take the job seriously.

As well as this, a need to rebuild relationships within the MCR itself—regret was expressed about the perceived divide between year-cohorts which has emerged within the graduate body; the President emphasised that though sedimentation into cohort groups is only natural, it needn't dominate, with better communication being a potential way to breach that gap. The desire of the MCR to be inclusive of and responsive to its members was affirmed; to establish and maintain a two-way channel between Committee and those it represents, in which information can be readily disseminated, and concerns readily raised.

The Vice-President also highlighted the importance of attending Committee meetings and taking the processes of Committee seriously as a way of maintaining healthy collaboration and collegiality between Committee members; to ensure that no member is ever out of the loop, and that the Committee can respond to current events effectively.

- a. Wiseman here raised the potential of a mentoring scheme he has been formulating to bring together postdocs and postgraduate students, which it was decided would be the subject of future discussion. He also, invoking his status as an elder greybeard, supported the Vice-President's call for rigorous Committee attendance, pointing out the value of experience on committees for all manner of future employment.
- ii. Both the President and Vice-President reported that they were due to meet with Junior Bursar later that afternoon to discuss the ongoing refurbishment of the old MCR space. Priorities were to try and establish the current state of the refurbishment works, and to establish a timeline for when the graduate body might be able to move back into their old home. Both President and Vice-President suggested that the works might at present be embroiled in the College's development masterplan, directing those who wanted to learn more to find the details published by the College on the Intranet.

Jakobs enquired as to whether the MCR has representation in the drawing-up of this masterplan—the President confirmed that it does, through the Buildings Committee, on which he himself as MCR President sits.

- a. Fotherby asked whether new furnishings for the refurbished MCR had been chosen yet. The President and Vice-President reported that new furniture has been chosen, though neither the past or present MCR Committee was involved in the choosing. The Vice-President found pictures of the proposed furnishings and presented them to the Committee. Fotherby expressed profound displeasure at the quantity of crushed velvet. The Vice-President reassured that the actual status of the furniture was currently

unknown to the Committee, and it was unclear whether it had already been purchased or was still subject to change. There was general approval of the proposed furnishings from the rest of the Committee, however.

- b. A member raised a concern about the potential want of key items in the MCR—there was general assent to both mugs and phone chargers being very desirable in the new premises, so long as they weren't persistently stolen.
 1. The question of whether to acquire a television and/or games console for the new MCR was mooted. Both Fotherby and Haggard were against the proposal, voicing concerns that it might negatively impact the social life of the MCR to have people watching television or playing games in isolation. The question of whether a television would even be used at all was also raised, especially given that the MCR is already equipped with a projector. Gibson mentioned that in his previous college's MCR, the television and games console did both become social foci, with very few people choosing to use them alone. A pin was put in the subject until the shape of the MCR development was better known.
 - c. On being asked by a member, the President confirmed that when the time comes, there will be an MCR moving-in party, with generous budget.
- iii. The President expressed his desire to maintain proper documentation throughout the year, in order that at the end of this Committee's lifespan, a thorough cache of material can be deposited with the College archivist for preservation—agendas and minutes of Committee meetings, but also photos of MCR events, and other similar memorabilia.

The Vice-President added that all of this archival material can be very useful for handovers, too.

The President concurred, and suggested that the upcoming move into the new MCR would be especially worthy of documentation.

Gibson affirmed that as Secretary he was very happy to act as a node for this archival process, and urged members to send him copies of all official documents which they might produce in the course of the year, as well as any photos or similar which they feel deserve preservation.

5) Communications

- i. The President proposed an internal communications system for the MCR Committee in which the main, and official, channel was via email, supplemented with a WhatsApp group chat, to be inaugurated later that day.
- ii. It was agreed that minutes are to be circulated to the wider MCR via email after receiving approval—the Vice President here asked if the approving organ was to be the entire

committee or only the President and Secretary, to which the President replied that the formally-required approval would be that of the President and the Secretary.

- iii. The President raised the matter of a recent incident on the postgraduate freshers' WhatsApp chat, handing over to Saraff to relate events in full in his capacity as the chat's co-admin. Saraff informed the Committee that in this incident of the previous week, inappropriate and disturbing images had been sent to the chat from the accounts of two MCR members, before being deleted soon afterwards. He made clear, however, that as best as could currently be understood, these images were not sent by the members themselves but by unknown others with access to their accounts. He pointed to a similar incident a couple of weeks previously in which insurgents from Churchill MCR had played havoc in the chat.

The President noted that at that moment only he himself and Saraff, who had founded the chat, were serving as its administrators, and suggested that the number be raised in order to better deal with similar incidents in the future. Saraff spoke against this idea, on the grounds that this brought about too great a diffusion of responsibility, and suggested that administration be made the responsibility of the Computing Officers.

At this point, several of the more seasoned members of the MCR voiced confusion about the exact nature of the WhatsApp chat, and Kirsch clarified that many members had had no idea until very recently that it existed at all. Haggard enquired as to how official it was—Saraff clarified that it was largely unofficial, but that he had set it up and advertised it through the Tutorial Office to serve as a postgraduate freshers' getting-to-know-you chat. Haggard suggested that since it now no longer served that purpose, but had morphed into a semi-official MCR entity for asking questions and advertising events, it would benefit from the same sort of moderation as the MCR Facebook page, in the hands of the MCR President.

The President himself, however, was against levelling too-officious administration at the chat—its semi-informality, he suggested, is its entire purpose.

Haggard opined that the MCR Facebook page is a much better forum for asking college-related questions and advertising events, with a much wider and more inclusive range of people active on it, and all able to both offer advice and participate in college-related discussion.

The Vice-President advocated against making the WhatsApp chat in any way official, and requested that email remain the dominant 'official' means of disseminating information, with Facebook a useful and easy-to-moderate backup, in order to reach those in the MCR who might not be regularly checking their emails. She voiced the opinion, received with general agreement by the room, that a WhatsApp chat quickly became a nightmare to navigate and back up if used to organise and communicate with a large number of participants.

Fotherby advocated that the entire chat be disbanded wholesale, and reformed afresh only for those interested, in order to establish firm and official separation from MCR officialdom.

Jakobs stepped in to defend the group chat as a useful friendly and informal means of communication, his feeling being that it served a useful social purpose, while stressing that he wasn't advocating its supplanting the Facebook group.

The President would be against the idea of disbanding the chat, but in agreement that email and Facebook, in that order, should be the means of communication put front and centre. The general notion of putting some official distance between the MCR committee and the group chat met with some warmth from the Committee at large, however, and a pin was put in the idea. It was determined that this will be the subject of future conversation between the President, Saraff, and the Computing Officers.

- iv. Kar asked about the possibility of formally archiving emails received by MCR Committee members in their official capacities. Both the President and Vice-President responded to say that this has been investigated in the past, but that the process of archiving email can be onerous; MCR Committee members, they warned, can receive a *lot* of emails, many not necessarily worthy of being archived.
- v. The state of the current MCR website was raised—it was generally agreed that it isn't currently in the best condition, being in dire need of an update to keep its information current and make it more user-friendly. It was suggested that the Computing Officers could take a natural lead in this matter.
 - a. The President also brought the Committee's attention to a recent offer made to the Executive by the College Communications Office, this being the production of profiles of Committee members for the College website. The President raised, too, an offer made by the Communications Office of a professional photographer to produce portraits of Committee members. It was clarified that though this was largely intended to produce content for the College's own website, the profiles and images could also be made use of by the MCR—though emphasised that this was an offer which could be freely taken up or declined by individual members according to personal preference.

6) Calendar of events

- i. The President noted the existence of some upcoming events not published on the current events calendar—that the dates for Eurovision 2024 had only recently been announced, for instance, traditionally accompanied by a watch-party in the MCR.

- ii. The President put it to the Committee that for future MCR events a professional photographer might be found to take responsibility for recording the night, if space could be found in the budget. It was suggested that this would relieve the burden of photography which has so far been placed on the Vice-President in her former role as Internal Ents Officer. General appreciation for the Vice-President's efforts in this regard was, at this juncture, voiced by the Committee at large, as was approval of the idea to find a photographer.

A member enquired as to whether the photographer would be able to participate in the night to some degree, and it was suggested that they might be given a ticket for the event as a humanitarian gesture, so as to not be kept waiting for hours in between pre- and post-drinks.

Several suggestions and volunteers for the job of photographer were made by Members, though the President emphasised that whoever was found ought to be separate from the MCR, in order to not be torn between photography and revelry, and ought to have some experience in photographing events.

Gibson mooted that a collection of disposable cameras could be acquired for MCR events, for people to supplement 'official' photos with those of their own. The Vice-President confirmed that this could be on the cards, and there was some assent from the room for the idea, though it was emphasised that if these disposables were stolen or abused they would quickly cease to be available.

- iii. The President introduced to the Committee a proposal from College's catering team to allow MCR members to attend formals held on a Thursday, until this point reserved exclusively for JCR members. He clarified that this suggestion had come about because of recent low attendance at Thursday formals by JCR members, which had put the dinners at risk of being uneconomical for the catering team to lay on, and had left their continuation in jeopardy.

A member voiced a concern that if the proposal were to be accepted it might set a precedent for potentially altering or doing away with the MCR Wednesday formal in the future—the Vice-President reassured that the suggestion had only been made because of low JCR attendance on Thursdays, from which there is no present or apparent future risk of the MCR Wednesday formal suffering. The proposal had also been made with the informal approval of the JCR Committee.

All members present expressed a desire not to impinge on the JCR's night, and agreed with concerns about the MCR's potentially flooding the available seats. However, it was suggested that this proposal might be accepted on a trial basis, if the JCR were to assent, to be reviewed when JCR uptake of Thursday formals might increase again.

Haggard was assigned the task of liaising on the matter with the JCR Committee, with the importance of emphasising the MCR Committee's intentions and position to the JCR stressed.

- a. Further to this, the topic of College's subject dinners was raised, with Fotherby pointing out that the MCR's members are often left out of invites to, and circulars advertising, subject events within College. The Vice-President agreed, adding that the MCR is often left out of the loop on the existence of college societies altogether. The need to work on rebuilding channels of communication between College and the MCR was again emphasised.

7) Presents for College staff

While expressing regret that bringing the idea officially to Committee meant that it would no longer be a surprise, the President motioned that the MCR lay hands on some Christmas presents for College officers; there was general enthusiasm for the idea, with the exact nature of the presents to be determined at a future point. Fudge, it was suggested, was traditional.

8) Open Discussion

- i. A member enquired as to when a future meeting to determine the formation of College societies might take place. It was confirmed that there would be an open meeting of the MCR in Lent term to vote on this subject. Fotherby made known his intentions to re-form the Jimmy Buffett society; Trinity Hall has now been adequately warned.
- ii. Wiseman put to the Committee a set of concerns about the UK Government's recent reform of visa law, as announced by the Home Secretary on 4th December, pointing out that 80 per cent of the current post-doctoral community in Trinity Hall have come from abroad. Of particular consternation were changes to the skilled worker visa and the family visa, whose minimum income requirements are due to rise to £38,700 from Spring 2024. These changes, Wiseman informed the Committee, mean that most postdocs, being on a lower income than this threshold, face potentially being denied a visa for either themselves or their partners.

The International Reps were assigned responsibility for keeping abreast of developments on this subject, it being acknowledged that this was very much an evolving situation. The President said that the University was likely to be formulating its own advice to postdocs in light of the reforms, and both he and Wiseman suggested keeping any advice issued by the MCR to its postdoctoral students in-step with that eventually drawn up by the University.

9) Organisation of future meetings and concluding remarks

The President thanked all attending, and expressed a preference for meetings in the new year to be organised well in advance, in order that Members can put them in the calendar in good time.

Both the President and Vice-President re-affirmed the importance of Members attending future meetings as regularly as possible.

--- o ---

Meeting concluded 1.40pm.

Minutes submitted by Benjamin Iago Gibson, MCR Secretary; approved by Jake Bransgrove, MCR President.