

MINUTES
Worcester College MCR General Meeting
Trinity Term, 2009
Sunday 31 May

Present: 16 members of Worcester College MCR

1. Matters arising
 - i. Phones
 - ii. Vacation residence
 - iii. Formal Hall booking
2. Changes to associate membership application
3. MCR member discipline
4. Finance report
5. Freshers' week
6. Domestic committee matters
 - i. Meal prices
 - ii. Rent changes
7. Computing committee matters
 - i. P2P
 - ii. Overusage sanctions
8. University committee matters
 - i. DPhil submission
 - ii. International student graduation
9. Any other business

1. Matters arising

i. Phones

College has confirmed that it is impossible to cut off just one or two phones on the college network, however from now on phone charges will be incorporated into one overall 'accommodation' charge to avoid giving the impression that they are an optional extra charge.

ii. Vacation residence

The questions of facilities during vacations is still being considered by college – they are aware that it is awkward for MCR members not to have hall etc, and this will be taken into account when new plans for hall and kitchen are put in place in the next few years. The President and Secretary will check the situation with the bar over the summer, and inform members.

iii. Formal Hall booking

Systems for booking formal hall online are being considered and should hopefully be put in place for testing in the near future. Members were asked to consider whether any particular time slot would be most

suitable for releasing tickets for 'special' formals, and the consensus was that 9 or 10 am, one week before the formal in question, should allow most people chance to get tickets.

2. Changes to associate membership application

Due to future changes in charities legislation (the college will be considered a charity), the college and MCR will have to look very closely at their constitutions. The MCR constitution currently states that Associate Members only have to prove "eligibility" in order for the MCR President to accept their application – there is no provision for any sort of character guarantee. Once associate members are admitted they gain certain rights with regard to college facilities etc, however the college itself has no jurisdiction over them. Given that there is also currently no system in place for terminating associate memberships (see 3, below), this effectively means that the President is required to make a decision to open college facilities to such members with no knowledge of their suitability.

We therefore suggest that applicants be required to provide a signature from the Dean (for former Worcester members) or from their partner (for spouses and partners of Worcester members) which would act as a guarantee of their adherence to MCR and college rules. The motion (Appendix) also provides an appeals system should such a signature be refused. Whilst we would hope that it would never be necessary to reject applications on these grounds, the motion does provide us with more security, and also prevent the decision being based purely on the Committee's own knowledge of an applicant.

It was questioned whether visiting students would have to provide such a signature, however the constitution states that all visiting graduates are automatically full members of the MCR, and therefore this is not a problem. It was also suggested that the wording of point (d) could be less complicated, however the President explained it was necessary to be explicit about applicants rights, including during the appeals process, for legal reasons.

The motion was passed with 15 votes for, none against, and will now be taken to JCC and governing body.

3. MCR associate member discipline

Along the same lines, the committee will have to start considering how to deal with the disciplinary procedure for associate members. The dean was unaware that we had no official means for ejecting associate members, should they contravene regulations, and this will be a requirement of the charities legislation. Whilst changing the constitution in this way will require consultation both with the college and with lawyers, the initial thinking is to consider termination of associate membership in the same way as ejection of committee members: the complaints would have to be provided in writing, and the decision to terminate would have to be agreed by 2/3 of members present at a quorate MCR meeting. We hope to have a motion ready for Michaelmas' General Meeting, but in the meantime any suggestions or questions will be welcome (there were none at the meeting).

4. Finance report

The Treasurer gave a brief report of our current financial status, informing members that it had been ascertained that the college provides the MCR with £9000 per annum, which is released into the MCR account as it is needed. It was asked how this compared to other MCRs, and how long this had been the figure, with a view to asking for it to be raised. The President agreed to ask other MCR Presidents for a comparison, however this figure seems to be just about sufficient for the current student numbers and typical running of the MCR.

5. Freshers' week

The Committee asked for suggestions from other members present about activities they did and didn't feel worked during Freshers' Week. The walk in Port Meadow was popular, however it was also pointed out that initial events were often advertised by email, and that many students had problems with setting up their computers in the early days and therefore missed out. It was decided to advertise all events on a designated

notice board in the MCR well in advance. It was also noted that next year there may be a student in a wheelchair, and therefore access to events would have to be a consideration.

6. Domestic committee matters

i. Meal prices

Following a meeting of the Junior Domestic Committee, the meal pricing structure will change from September, when graduates will be incorporated into the new global pricing system. Under this system, meals will be charged at different rates for students with kitchen, students without kitchens, and students living out. Graduates currently all fall under the 'living out' category, paying £3.45 for hall. Next year, all those living in college accommodation will be counted as 'living in with kitchens', paying £2.86 for hall. Those living out will pay £3.60.

ii. Rent changes

a) Payment of undergraduate rents is changing to a model of advance payment. Whilst graduates will continue to pay by standing order, should the standing order fail by Christmas, graduates will be batted for the whole previous term, and in advance for the whole next term. Clearly, if there are serious extenuating circumstances, these should be communicated immediately to the college accountant.

b) The college is proposing an increase of 4.3% for 2009-10 based on the traditional model of taking the university-wide Van Noorden pricing index, and adding on the percentage needed to recuperate any loss from the previous year. OUSU expects the average increase to be around 4.4%, and therefore the committee is recommending that this increase be accepted. No other members present raised any objections.

c) Undergraduate rooms are to be rebanded from next year. The college was not planning to consider graduate rooms, however the committee was asked to canvas opinion. It was noted that the question of different bands within the Franks building had been raised last year, but no action had ever been taken. Similarly, Worcester House rooms are apparently being charged at a higher grade than was initially advertised. The President will contact the Domestic Bursar with a view to bringing up this issue at the next JCC.

Other housing matters brought to the Committee's attention were the state of the basement of Worcester House, and the question of the cleaning of Worcester Place accommodation over the summer. These matters will also be taken to the Domestic Bursar.

7. Computing committee matters

i. Network outages

These should now have been solved.

ii. Overusage sanctions

The college is planning to put into place a system which will cut off the internet connection of anyone using an excessive amount of bandwidth. This could potentially affect people using i-player very frequently, and therefore it was noted that simple guidelines will have to be provided. However this system will not be in place until there is also a webpage available for checking individual bandwidth usage.

8. University committee matters

i. DPhil submission

The university is aware of some issues with differences in DPhil submission procedures in different departments, some of which require several signatures and confirmations, and result in problems for international students obtaining visas. They intend to work towards standardisation of this process, however in the meantime anyone with this problem should contact this international office, who can advise on visas.

ii. International student graduation

A university committee raised the question of graduation for international students, suggesting that many are unable to attend as ceremonies often take place months or even years after they have returned home. Whilst graduation is another matter which the university as a whole is looking to reform in the next few years, it has been suggested that if colleges find this a particular problem, they should ask deans of degrees to reserve spaces for international students on summer degree ceremonies. However, those present at the MCR meeting concluded that this was not a problem that only affected international students, and furthermore that the different end dates for different graduate courses would make this very difficult to manage. Since Worcester reserves just a few places on such a large number of graduation ceremonies throughout the year anyway, attempting to keep some of these places back for international students would just cause confusion and more problems.

9. Any other business

A mailing list is going to be set up over the summer for those still in Oxford. This will be opt-in only, and will hopefully allow the organisation of MCR events and even combined events with other colleges.

The next General Meeting will take place on Sunday of 6th week of Michaelmas Term, 2009.

Appendix

Proposed Changes to MCR Associate Membership

Current constitution:

1. Associate membership of Worcester College MCR is open to:
 - a) spouses and long-term partners (typically co-habitees) of MCR members;
 - b) 4th-year undergraduates (not including those reading for a Bachelors degree); and previous JCR or MCR members who still have an academic connection to Oxford University or Oxford Brookes University or who are living and working in Oxford.
2. Associate Membership will be extended to applicants upon:
 - a) confirmation of their eligibility by the Tutor for Graduates; and
 - b) approval by the MCR President.

We propose:

2. Associate Membership will be extended to applicants upon:

a) confirmation of their eligibility by the Tutor for Graduates; and

b) approval by the MCR President, and

c) confirmation from either:

- i) the Dean for those eligible under 1.(b); or**
- ii) their spouse or partner for those eligible under 1.(a)**

that they know of no reason why they should not be granted associate membership; unless

d) applicants are not able to satisfy 2.c) i) or ii), whereupon either:

- i) they have the right to withdraw their application; or**
- ii) they give permission for any relevant details to be passed (in confidence) to the MCR president and secretary by those stated in 2.c)i) or ii).**

The decision to confer associate membership will then be made by the MCR president and secretary after further consultation with the applicant.