



Downing MCR Open Meeting Agenda 3pm Sunday 5th March 2017

1 | Minutes from the Previous Open Meeting

2 | Committee Reports

President
Vice-President
Treasurer
Welfare & Education Officers
Bar, Sports, & Amenities Officers
Environmental Officer
Social Secretaries
Communications Officer
International Officer
Equal Opportunities Officer

3 | Review of College Rents and Accommodation

3.1 | Future Room Distribution
3.2 | Ballots Points System
3.3 | Catering & Facilities Charge

4 | Refugee Scholarship Fundraising Event

5 | Magazines in the MCR

6 | Matters Raised by MCR Members

6.1 | Donation to Cambridge University Foodbank Society
6.2 | Emergency Motions (if raised)

7 | MCR Matriculation Photo 2017

Downing MCR Open Meeting Motions

3.1 | Future Room Distributions [PA]

3.1.1 | Background

A survey done by the respective JCR and MCR committees of their relevant students has revealed that rent prices are a key concern. Each year both MCR and JCR students submit their names into a separate ballots which allocates priority for students to choose from the available list of rooms in college. There is a different and pre-negotiated list of rooms allocated to JCR and MCR members. There are a greater number of lower-quality, cheap rooms available to the JCR student body than there is available to the MCR. However analysis done by the college itself has revealed that in accommodation ballot, there is a systematic bias for JCR students with high priority in the ballot to pick more expensive rooms first. However, in the MCR ballot the most expensive rooms are almost always picked by students with lower priority in the ballot. Similar to the MCR, the JCR students list rent prices as a key concern; however as demonstrated by the data collected over many years from successive JCR ballots *there is less demand within the JCR for cheap rooms in comparison to the MCR*. We appreciate the fact that some JCR students need cheaper accommodation, however the demand for cheaper rooms in the JCR is much lower than that of the MCR, yet the JCR student body are allocated a majority of cheaper rooms. In practice both student bodies would benefit from a reallocation of some cheaper rooms to the MCR in exchange for new and high quality rooms to the JCR.

3.1.2 | Proposal

This MCR believes that there is an under-availability of mid/low range rent band accommodation, and that the Committee should look to exchange desirable rooms with the JCR in return for cheaper accommodation. This would include rooms on Lensfield Road, and rooms within staircases in exchange for rooms on the first floor of Battcock Lodge.

3.2 | Ballot Points System [AB]

3.2.1 | Introduction

As sign of gratitude and to ensure the presence of certain officers on campus, some MCR Committee members receive *Bonus-Points* for the room ballot taking place in the year of their participation in the MCR Committee. Currently the points are distributed as follows:

MCR President	-	10 Points
MCR Vice-President	-	5 Points
MCR Welfare Officers	-	5 Points

The *Bonus-Points* naturally only affect those students seeking a degree longer than a MPhil.

3.2.2 | Proposal

This MCR believes that the room ballot bonus points should be reevaluated for next years committee in order to better reflect the contributions of committee members. To do that, we propose the redistribution of the points currently awarded:

MCR President	-	6 Points	[0 Points]
MCR Vice-President	-	4 Points	[-1 Points]
MCR Treasurer	-	3 Points	[+3 Points]
MCR Welfare Officer	-	3 Points	[-2 Points]
MCR Bar, S., A.	-	3 Points	[-1 Points]

3.3 | Catering & Facilities Charge [TRC]

3.3.1 | Background

The Catering & Facilities Charge (CFC, also known to some as the Kitchen Fixed Charge, KFC) was, until the academic year 2016/2017, a termly charge on the College bill which covered the cost of providing catering facilities (depreciation, utilities, insurance, and labour) as well as the provision of IT facilities. Meanwhile, rents included the cost of basic insurance and PAT testing. The CFC was charged in order to keep costs at the point of service (reasonably) low, encouraging students to use the facilities and participate in traditional facets of college lifestyle.

However, CFCs varied in magnitude (and name) from year to year as various costs were moved back and forth between it and weekly rents. This led to confusion as to what was included in rent and many students felt that the inclusion of this charge on college bill came as an unfair surprise. Therefore, in discussion with previous JCR and MCR committees, the College came to the decision to combine all costs of living into one weekly *accommodation charge* (not 'rent'), in order to ensure that there were no hidden costs to living in College.

The CFC previously sat at £165/term (£495/year) for students living in College. It is now charged as a £13/week component of the 'accommodation charge', which was calculated as equivalent to the old system based on the costs over standard JCR contract lengths (30 and 38 week contracts, respectively). As a result, over a standard 51-week contract that most 12-month MPhils and PhDs will have, this now amounts to £663/year -- an additional £168/year burden on students living internally. This is due to the fact that under the old system, the charge was made termly, however the new system effectively includes a new fourth 'term' over the summer. It is notable that whilst CFC goes on during the summer, many catering facilities are limited during the period, with no regular formal halls and, due to conferencing clashes, standard hall only available on 48 of the 106 of evenings of summer 2016 (although it is notable that the use of this facility by the MCR also drops during this period).

Under the old system external members were charged a reduced CFC rate. Under the new system, the external CFC was abolished, so that MCR members living out of College no longer have any CFC costs, a net benefit for some MCR members.

In the minutes of the Downing MCR Open Meeting of 17th March 2016, it was noted that *'none of us at rent negotiations were aware of this change, indeed all that was mentioned by the senior bursar was that the KFC will be moved'*, and that although the reasoning was deemed to be 'fairer' to all students, the new system moves the burden of payment onto the MCR, as the JCR have shorter contracts. Indeed, a recent email by the previous JCR Treasurer to the undergraduate mailing lists (dated 15th February 2017, and from which much of the most up-to-date information in this motion was taken) noted that even long JCR contracts (38 weeks) have seen a reduced rate under the new system, paying only the 35-week equivalent of £455/year (a reduction compared to the old system).

3.3.2 | Proposal

It is the opinion of the current committee that the new system proves an unfair burden on the MCR generally and internal members specifically. Whilst it is true that external members have seen costs reduced under this system, this is not an arrangement that will benefit all in their time at Downing (e.g. 12-month MPhils), and this can be seen as unfair as it is not necessarily true that members living internally to College use the catering facilities more. Indeed, many externally-living members choose to benefit significantly from the subsidised services (including formals), and use of services, particularly at lunchtime, can also relate to the proximity of your department from Downing, not just your home.

The MCR President and Vice-President brought these concerns to the Senior Bursar during the current round of rent negotiations, prepared to discuss a variety of potential solutions.

1. We proposed that the external CFC might be reintroduced, with the consent of the MCR, and used as in the old system so that the additional summer CFC charges for internally living students might be abolished.
2. We proposed that the external CFC might be reintroduced, with the consent of the MCR, and used to reduce the internal CFC rate for all internally living students throughout the year.

The Senior Bursar was skeptical that such an arrangement might be approved of by the MCR at large, a sentiment we hope to find out about at this Open Meeting. She countered that:

3. College might be able to offer some form of 'sweetener' for students living in College in the summer, such as reduced summer formal rates (which are currently charged at private formal rates).

The committee notes that, whilst this is a kind offer, it in no way balances the additional £168/year students are being charged under the new system.

It is clear that there is more to discuss with regards to this topic, but we hope that the Open Meeting affords us an opportunity to reach an agreement about how we might best mitigate the additional costs presented under the new CFC system, and to vote on a motion, amended from the one presented below, that might be presented to College:

This MCR believes that the Committee should petition the College to alleviate the effects of the new Catering & Facilities charge, which unfairly burdens MCR members living in College

through the summer, according to a mitigating system agreed upon during the Open Meeting.