



Open Meeting Minutes

Monday 30th of October 2023

- Paula Teeuwen

Committee members present:

Praharsh Babu, Co-president
Sam Ryan, Co-president
Paula Teeuwen, Secretary
Samuel Stark, Treasurer
Yorgos Chatziavgerinos, LGBTQ+ Officer
Tanja (Tatjana) Schmidt, Formal Hall Officer
Jessica van de Grint, Food and Drink Officer
Anna Dowd, Accommodation Officer
William Lan, Welfare Officer (online)
Tom Willis, Computer Officer (online)

Members present in person:

Eddie Xiao
Robert Hao
Tobia Nava
Louis Christie
David Martin
Keera (Keerthana) Bathula

18.36 Start

Praharsh starts the meeting and welcomes everyone.

Freshers Week

Paula asks the attendees whether they have any feedback on the Freshers week.

Louis starts with expressing his disappointment in the committee. He notes that he did not receive any communication about the Freshers week, even though he would have wanted to have the opportunity to meet the new Freshers. Praharsh notes that there are no rules in the constitution that say we have to open the Freshers week to all members and that there was the option to be involved in the Freshers week as a parent, which he notes Louis did not sign up for. Additionally, Praharsh notes that the decision to keep it to Freshers only was made due to several factors that were discussed extensively. Examples are to have a focus on

Freshers meeting each other, keeping numbers predictable and other more sensitive issues. Louis reiterates his disappointment, to which Tanja responds that Louis could have emailed the committee to express his interest in joining the Freshers week. Several other members have done this, and they received information following this. Louis expresses his confusion as to why this was not circulated to the whole community and why people should have to ask this. Tanja responds by repeating the notion that there were separate issues that lead to this decision. Louis notes that this does not make it the right decision. Sam and Praharsh note that these reasons have been discussed with the college and that they advised us on this issue. Following this, it was determined that the safest way would be to not widely advertise the Freshers week. Tanja notes that our priority was the Freshers safety, and that Louis should trust that we made the right decision. Tanja also notes that the people who showed interest in the Freshers week did join and most also joined as a parent. Louis continues by noting that unadvertised opportunities are not opportunities and that he is still disappointed. Paula concludes this discussion by stating that Louis' disappointment is noted.

Paula continues the conversation by asking the Freshers who are attending the meeting to talk about how they experienced the Freshers week. Eddie, who was a Fresher during this Freshers week, replies that he thought this Freshers week was better than the JCR Freshers week. Paula asks him what he thought about the number of events and whether he for example would think more or less events would be better. Eddie replies that he thought there was the right number of events, although it did reach saturation.

Paula turns the question to the MCR Committee members and asks whether they think it was too much to organise (workload-wise) or whether they thought it was fine. Praharsh replies with noting two major issues we had to deal with that increased workload. The first was that due to the marking boycott the exact numbers of Freshers were unknown until the last moment. Therefore, we could not give much notice for the Freshers week and lead to lots of things not being in our control. The second issue was that we did not have social secretaries, similar to last year. Due to this, other committee members had to chip in more.

Samuel continues the discussion by asking whether we had a broad enough scope of activities. Eddie replies that it was great to have both quiet and less quiet events. Praharsh also wonders whether there was enough variety and notes that issues with coordinating room bookings with the JCR did limit the type of events somewhat. Tanja mentions that it may be good to make a survey about the orientation week and ask the Freshers about these things.

Paula puts forward an email she received from Verlyne about the Freshers week, as a reply to asking about written feedback in an email promoting the Open Meeting in case members couldn't attend. Paula reads the email out loud (see below)

A Huge Thank you!!!

I may not be able to attend the meeting however I wanted to take a moment to say how thrilled I am with the MCR team and all the events. Everyone has been

absolutely lovely and it's been great to get to know everyone. All the activities have been wonderful and they focus both on Catz events and also advertising other events around the university. I see the MCR as having a group of friends (already built-in community) that has been around and is thrilled to show you around and help navigate what's new (via WhatsApp or in person). That's priceless and has been the most helpful! Thank you, thank you and thank you!

The MCR committee is happy to hear this positive feedback.

Paula continues the discussion by asking what we thought about the attendance during Freshers week. Jessica notes that the Freshers were noted very late about the events, which could have influenced attendance.

*Keera and David walk into the MCR and join the meeting

Paula suggests we could notify the Freshers in some way that there will be something. Details are not needed, but then they know there will be something in their first week and they don't have to plan other things. Tanja suggests that we can ask college whether they can include this in their welcome email. Jessica adds that we could add this to the survey as well. Keera notes that she was surprised even that she got information that early. Sam notes that there were students who got offers on the Friday before the Freshers week.

Praharsh notes that we are planning to organise a mini-Freshers week in the first week of Lent. Due to the marking boycott, more students than usual will start their studies in Lent. College may have some money available for this. Sam explains that there could be extra events, an induction and introduction of the Freshers into the wide community during this extra Freshers week.

Keera praises the Freshers week by giving two thumbs up. She notes that there was a good variety of events, however she notes some people said that a lot of events involved alcohol. She also notes that there were less passive events that don't involve alcohol, such as the movie night. However, there was only one person who showed up to the movie night. Tanja notes we should add this to the survey too. Paula adds that only two people showed up to the Botanic Garden event. She also notes that there is no obligation to drink alcohol at events were other people drink alcohol. Tanja notes that the punting event was completely full and Sam adds that this was the same for the ADC event. The attendees wonder whether the pub quiz would be seen as a 'a drinking event'. Paula notes that it is focused on bringing people together, not on drinking. Keera mentions that it could be held at a local pub instead of the bar. Paula replies that any event we can hold at the bar should be held at the bar to give them more business.

*18.45 Anna leaves the meeting to work at the bar

David talks about his experience during the Freshers week. He mentions that he didn't go to many events since he was oblivious to most of it. Paula asks him why he didn't go to them and what we could do different to encourage people to go to events. Louis notes that we should host enough events so that everyone could go to some of them. Praharsh notes that especially the Judge Business School students have late lectures, that could interfere with events. Sam adds that it may be better not to host events on the night after matriculation (we had the pub quiz that evening). Praharsh notes that we did this due to a JCR booking clash. Sam continues by noting that there were clashes with inductions of departments, for example with matriculation.

Samuel talks about the charging of events. Several events were charged to attendees at a discounted rate. The payments for footlights and Lola's club night went fine, however 18 people haven't paid yet for the family formal. Praharsh suggests that we could ask college to put this on the college bill of students who have still not paid. Samuel mentions that the budget of last year said it would cost the MCR 2000 pounds to run if we don't charge, however this number might not be the true number since we don't know the real expense. It is unsure if we were charged for this last year, which is why we don't know the real number. Paula notes that regardless of whether college charges us or not, in the end it does cost us a lot. She asks why we don't just use Upay to have students buy tickets. Tobia notes that it may be too early. Louis and Paula agree that we could simply explain to new students how Upay works. Praharsh concludes that next year we should use Upay or have college add it to the college bill.

Yorgos mentions that the LGBTQ+ event (separate from Freshers week) was successful. David adds that he went to this event. There was good attendance, and it was open to all years. The event was advertised in the lgbtq+ group chat. Yorgos notes that next year it may be better to not only rely on WhatsApp, but to also use the newsletter to distribute the information. Paula notes that because of the change in committee members and the holiday she did not start writing the newsletter until after the Freshers week. It may be better to start earlier and to use posters on Instagram too. Yorgos notes that based on the budget, there can be one LGBTQ+ event per month, however other events at other colleges will also be advertised. An event every week would be too much.

*Robert walks in at 19.00

Motion: PhD + Medics Wine and Cheese

The attendees discuss the motion submitted by Louis, seconded by Luke Cullen:

It is a shame that the current committee has elected to hold exclusive events that diminish the ability of the community to function as a whole. This includes both the current wine and cheese evenings that exclude masters students and the fresher's week events, that did not enable existing MCR members to meet the incoming students. I move to end the exclusivity and return to whole MCR social events.

Louis further describes his motion, noting that he proposes these events to be opened to all members of the MCR. He does not believe in having an event that excludes people in the community. One of the reasons was given that it allows PhD students to meet other students that are staying longer at Catz (i.e., longer than 1 year). Louis notes that it creates division when you say you don't want to be associated with Mphils (edit: No one said this, and this is not the reason to have PhD wine and cheese events).

Tanja draws a similarity with the queer events, which are advertised for queer students. Louis notes that it is unfair to exclude straights. Tanja notes that they are included.

Keera notes that there was a Wine and Cheese events for freshers and that, although she cannot speak for everyone, she did not feel excluded knowing about the PhD wine and cheese events. She understands that it is another group that gets their events and that there are many events for everyone. David agrees and notes that there were indeed Mphils and undergrads that he saw at the PhD wine and cheese event. Praharsh adds that they could have been guests from PhD students. David continues by stating that it is not a matter of exclusion. PhD is a different world and them having the opportunity to network is important. Praharsh notes that these events can promote PhD's to come to event specially marketed to them. He also notes that there was a complaint last year regarding not including PhD's enough. On top of that, Praharsh mentions that organising big open-to-all Wine and Cheese events creates a budgetary problem where lower quality wine and cheese has to be bought in order for it to be enough. Samuel agrees with this and notes that there is a heavy loss being made on wine and cheese events every time it is ran. Louis disagrees and notes that when the MCR funds the event, it should be open to everyone. Sam notes that they do get charged, however about half is subsidised. Tanja notes that many PhD students rarely go to any events and often don't see a lot of the money we use to subsidise other events. Sam notes that it makes PhD students very happy to go to this, especially since they don't go to any other events usually. Our goal is to bring people back into the MCR and College. Tobia notes that he appreciates having the space to talk to other PhD students in similar situations and Sam agrees that PhD students could be dealing with similar issues that they can talk about. Praharsh agrees and notes that we want to bring students who don't engage a lot with college to be brought back into college. Louis doesn't agree with this and notes that it is not the MCR's job to run specific events and that it is the graduate body's responsibility to organise specific events. Louis thinks that the MCR should focus on inclusive events as much as possible. Tanja states that the college doesn't do this, and this would result in having nothing for PhD students. Praharsh mentions that EMBA's pay the college 50 grand a year and they also get events specifically marketed to them to feel included.

Louis suggests making the PhD Wine and Cheese events open to all members and to advertise these events as a way for students to network and ask PhD students about life as a PhD student. He notes that this could be valuable for those considering applying for a PhD who would have a way to network with students already doing a PhD. Tanja does not agree and states that she would not go to an event marketed for MPhils to ask questions to PhD students. Tanja thinks this is a whole different idea and we could in that case organise career

events separately. Louis questions Tanja by asking whether she said she did not want to socially engage with MPhils students. Tanja replies that that is not what she meant.

Praharsh continues the discussion by stating that there are 40 tickets available for Wine and Cheese events. He worries that when it is open-to-all, that whoever is first will get the tickets. Since MPhils are generally more engaged with the MCR, he is worried the events get sold out and leaving PhD students without tickets. He wonders whether the platform could allow for an allocation-based system. Sam replies that selling the tickets now is based on trust. Samuel suggests that we could open the selling of tickets to PhD's first or set aside at least 5 tickets for Mphils. He summarises by stating that a new system could prioritise PhD students, but that it would still be marketed everywhere. He is willing to look into this. Praharsh worries that this may cause extra admin. Samuel notes that he is now using two categories already (Catz PhD / Guest) and that it should be fine to add extra.

Tanja mentions that these events are not exclusive to one group, but instead it is inclusive to another. These events provide a safe space where PhD students can talk to each other about the difficulty of PhD life which may not be suitable to talk about when MPhils are around. PhD students are challenged by their work and sometimes deal with mental health issues. Louis laughs and asks Tanja whether she is saying Mphils are ruining her mental health. A discussion follows related to this misinterpretation where Tanja notes it is unfair of Louis to construe her words in this way, which Louis finds laughable. Praharsh ends the situation by noting that everyone should treat each other with respect and that it is rude to laugh at attendees.

The meeting resumes by allowing the attendees to vote on three options:

- 1) Open PhD wine and cheese events to every MCR member
→ Two votes, Louis and Tom
- 2) Continue PhD wine and cheese events exactly as it is, where there is an alternation between open and closed events
→ 11 votes
- 3) Compromise the PhD wine and cheese events, where there is preferential ticketing or pre-allocation for PhD students (something to be figured out later)
→ Two votes, Praharsh and Paula

The attendees have voted on option two. Louis thanks the attendees for hearing his motion. Yorgos notes that we should advertise more clearly that we will be alternating open/closed events and Praharsh agrees.

*Louis leaves the meeting at 19.38

Vacant roles

Praharsh notes that the role of Womens and NB officer, access officer and 4th year representative are still vacant. The other roles that are unfilled have candidates running in the election. Praharsh asks the attendees what we could do to get people into these roles. He notes he has heard from several people who are interested, which could be co-opted into these roles. Praharsh notes that the decision for choosing who to co-opt will be for Sam and Praharsh. Sam notes that there will be an influx of people in January. Praharsh suggests we could co-opt students until January, who could run in the election if we do one again in January. Who to choose until January will be based on professional opinion. David suggests students who want to run in January could send in an application if they think they can do better than the student chosen before January. Praharsh estimates that there will be 30 people extra in January and that he wants the election to be fair for them. David notes that we could appoint officers now and can do an election later. William notes that he will graduate in January and that he will leave his role. Praharsh notes that it is worth doing an election in January and that the constitution does not cap the number of elections. Tanya notes that we should make it more clear what access officer means. Sam notes that the title is important and asks the attendees whether there is a problem with renaming it to disability officer. Paula replies that the role includes neurodivergent students and that you cannot call those students disabled. Praharsh notes we can add a name change to the upcoming constitutional change.

Accessibility

Praharsh informs the attendees about current problems that a student is having with accessibility. The student has asked Anna and Kim to help with this situation and with talking to college about this. The student is angry with college. Jessica notes that the student is more confident if the communication can go through the MCR. Praharsh notes that Kim asked whether Sohane could help as well. Praharsh explains again that the student has asked the MCR committee for support and to go see the room in question and the accessibility problems related to his mobility scooter in person. Sam continues by stating that the college is worried about fire safety and that the scooter does not leave enough space for people to go around in the case of a fire. On top of that, the porters are worried that charging the battery under the specific staircase is not safe and that the space under another staircase is safer (i.e., better charging port). Sam also notes that the MCR does not want to get involved in the anger and just wants to represent the student fairly. Praharsh agrees and notes that the MCR cannot tell the college what to do, but we can take pictures, gather proof, and try to understand the situation better. Jessica and Tanja agree that we can act as an objective mediator and listening to the student.

20.00 (?) End

The committee closes the meeting with two final remarks. Tanja notes that there should be official communication about the damage done to objects in the MCR (i.e., broken chair leg) where it is encouraged that students report to us if something happens. Paula asks whether it is possible to make a voice recording next open meeting to allow for more effective

notetaking. Paula worries that in the current way there is a higher possibility for misunderstanding people's words or opinions. In this case the recording will only be used for transcribing and will be deleted afterwards. Paula emphasises the importance of this, as at several points during the meeting speakers referred to the notes to check whether they said something or not. Prahars ends the meeting at 20.00 (exact time not recorded).