

MCR Open meeting 04/05/2015 – minutes

17 present. Meeting starts at 4.07 PM.

- 1) Reduction of the MCR dinner ticket from £18 to £15 by removal of cheese course

MCR dinner ticket prize is £18. Afnan contacted catering and they informed him that, by removing the cheese course, the price would reduce to £15.

All the attendees vote in favour of removing the cheese course from the MCR dinner menu.

- 2) Introduction of a “Women’s Hour” in the gym

The three JCR members present at the meeting explained why they would like to introduce the gym hour for women only.

Lee (JCR president): the issue is not really about intimidation, but it is mainly an issue of body consciousness or for some women not feeling comfortable when exercising in front of men. The JCR have not shut down completely the idea of beginners’ hour, but they feel like this would not solve the issue completely.

JCR member 2: The JCR are not trying to attack anyone in particular regarding bad behaviour from male JCR/MCR members going to the gym, but the issue is more about how girls feel in the gym.

Lee: at the moment, there are many girls in College who do not feel comfortable and this is an issue they must address as JCR.

Gen: some people do not use the gym because they do not feel comfortable.

Max: privacy is not really an option for a College gym. In response to this, several members suggest to use blinds or stickers on the windows of the gym.

Ellie: it would be good to have a women’s only hour, but this should be introduced for men too. The JCR members present at the meeting agree with this suggestion, although this has not been raised as a possible thing that should be considered by the JCR guys.

Heidi: it is ironic that we are trying to introducing some form of segregation again, while we are celebrating the admission of women into College 40 years ago.

MCR member: at the meeting with the bursar where gym equipment to be bought was decided, only men were represented and this is an issue.

At this stage of the discussion, all attendees agree on not making the whole discussion become a big social issue on a much more general scale, but rather keep the discussion focused on College.

Gen: this motion would help people to feel less comfortable with the environment in which they may train and to familiarize more with it.

Max: an important point to consider is that this is not really a women-only issue. Also men may feel uncomfortable, for instance if they do not have a good body, and experience the same kind of issue when exercising with other women in the gym.

Heather: an ‘encouraged women-only hour’ or priority hour (with men still allowed to join) should probably be introduced.

Some other attendees also suggest that a gym can perhaps be booked for one hour only, but the counter-argument to this is that gym is an open space and cannot be booked.

Lee: there are gyms around the UK that also offer women-only training courses. This sort of things happen in the real world and with this motion we would not end up protecting women inside College without exposing them to things that happen in the real world.

Lee: there is a significant portion of the JCR that is in favour of the motion and that voted in favour of it, so the JCR committee had to take this issue into account properly.

Other JCR member: about 160 responses were received in the recent JCR referendum on this matter and 120 votes were in favour.

Gen: segregation argument – in the last MCR committee meeting, some people suggested that some women should go to the Newnham gym, but this is not a fair solution to the problem.

MCR member: there is a high level of exposure to body performance in the gym, which may represent a serious problem for someone who experienced other serious issues/forms of sexual harassment through his/her entire life.

JCR member: some people may have fear of a sexual assault, and this fear may rise in an environment where other people show masculinity. There is a specific case of someone who has decided not to go to the College gym for this reason.

The MCR Welfare officer agrees with him that the two things are linked.

MCR president: it is more important to address the issue of harassment with different approaches such as introducing a code of conduct and a system of reporting.

JCR president: we should get some personal trainers back to the gym. We did have personal trainers but College have decided to cut them off completely and the JCR had to make a gym video for novice users. The women-only hour does not solve the problem (the code of conduct would be certainly necessary), but it is something that would help things change a bit.

The MCR Welfare officer asks which time of the week the JCR would like to introduce this women-only hour if the motion passes. The JCR president replies that they would like to hear from the MCR and find a mutually convenient time before deciding.

Gen: some people may have a muscular disorder and for them a women-only hour would be helpful.

Peter: there is not really a link between masculinity and specific kinds of exercise that a woman cannot be do at the gym. The conversation is detrimental because it would end up with having women less involved in gym activities.

In addition, men can be less able to come forward with issues like this, since they are also very likely to have the same kind of problems.

Frankie: would the women and men hour be introduced with another referendum or at the same time?

JCR president: it should not be necessary to have another referendum, since the men-only hour is just an amendment of the previous decision.

Options for the referendum are discussed. Several people think there should only be two options (e.g. are you in favour of the motion? With yes or no as possible answers) If the answer is No, there would be a sub vote allowing people to come up with alternative suggestions.

Other attendees suggest that the referendum should include the following questions: Would you like a women-only hour? Would you like a men-only hour? Would you like neither?

JCR president: if the women-only hour turns out not to be used, they have to get back to this proposal and perhaps cancel it, but this would require making another referendum.

The general idea is that in six months from now we would check how things are going. If the women-only hour is not working, then we can have another referendum to cancel the previous decision. In the end, the vote would be for just hour per week.

MCR members: also fellows, conference guests, staff should be interrogated on this and be asked what they think. Moreover, we should see how things change during vacation term.

Max: we should have the vote first and then see how to proceed from there.

JCR member: the bursar said that if JCR and MCR agree, the College council would pass this motion and not be against it.

JCR member: it would be interesting to see how most of the MCR women would react to this.

Max: there is no provision in our MCR constitution to vote by gender. Either someone is a member of the MCR or not. Therefore, a referendum by gender is something that cannot be set up since unconstitutional.

Nigel: body consciousness issue. It is very difficult to understand where this issue comes from. Possibly, some women may also look at other women that are much better at training than them and may feel equally intimidated by them, according to the argument they are making.

JCR president: the issue was not raised because there are women that feel there are men looking like predators in the gym. The only issue is that there are some girls feeling not very confident (It is not a sexual assault, but it is a body confidence issue).

JCR member: 90% of sexual assault is to women.

Nigel: Selwyn is a comfortable place.

MCR Welfare, Nathalie: there are some other people who may not feel in the same situation and see Selwyn gym as very comfortable place.

Farid: we understand this motion is meant to encourage some people who are currently having problems in using the gym to overcome this issue. Assuming that we get there, it is important to ask how we are going to implement this or to make sure that, on the long term, we can get rid of this form of segregation.

MCR member: there is a specific case of sexual harassment that happened in the gym.

Other MCR member: there have been cases of sexual harassment from women too.

MCR president: the women-only hour in the gym is not a solution to the very serious problem of sexual harassment.

A referendum to let the MCR vote on this motion will be open at 9.00 PM. The meeting gets adjourned at 5.05 PM.