

## **Declaration of the position of the welfare team regarding the role and set-up of the welfare team, the communication policy of the welfare team and the position of the welfare team on gender exclusive activities**

The welfare team for the academic year 2016/17 made up of the undersigned declares the following:

1. The welfare team is of the belief that while cooperation is necessary and commendable, especially for the more large and challenging events like the fresher's week, language mentor-ship program etc. it is essential that, while being mindful of the community as a whole, there is a clear distinction and separation of roles between the members so that each welfare officer can provide tailor-made support targeted at those issues most relevant to the part of the MCR community that falls under his/her responsibility. If these boundaries are not maintained, there is the real risk that some issues might be considered secondary to others. Having said that, the welfare team understands that a sharp separation would be ignorant of the spectrum that exists in our community and the resulting complex intersection of realities, experiences and issues. As such individuals should have the right to associate themselves, with full confidentiality, with any number of welfare officers if they so choose to. Ultimately, the MCR community is made up of individuals and not a few homogeneous groups.
2. The welfare team pledges to better map its communication according to the target audience while maintaining respect for the wider community. Communication targeted to everyone will be sent to everyone and communication targeted to a particular group will be sent to that particular group. In any and all cases, communication will be scrutinized by at least the writer and a fellow member of the welfare team to identify and weed out potentially offensive vocabulary, tone or sentence structures. We hope to liaise with other committee members to successfully achieve this from a technical standpoint. This is to prevent not only spamming but also to prevent unfortunate situations where offence might be caused.

3. The welfare team is of the belief that while gender inclusive activities must form the backbone of the social calendar of the MCR community, there is also a place for gender exclusive events. This is in line with the college itself. We must cater for those individuals who for reasons either personal, religious or cultural might feel more comfortable surrounded by people of their own gender. In a wider sense, the welfare team believes that in moderation, having events which group, and are exclusive to, people of the same gender helps create or enrich friendly relationships where a gender inclusive event might fail to do so.
  
4. In conclusion the welfare team strongly believes that communication and openness with the due understanding and empathy for all sides involved is the key to a healthy MCR community. The welfare team understands that individuals have varying opinions, beliefs and philosophies and that we are duty bound to respect diversity as long as it manifests in a lawful fashion. The aim of the welfare team is to foster growth and do everything within reason to accommodate the needs and requirements of every subset of the community.

- Fabian Micallef
- Alisha Kasam
- Anwar Jaber
- Tamas Kispeter

Welfare team 2016/17

## **Statement by Alisha Kasam**

Dear MCR members,

Im sorry for not addressing you in person but unfortunately I am out of town during the TGM. It has been suggested that gendered events are segregating the MCR community and making some people feel excluded or offended. Actually, the job of the welfare officers is to promote a welcoming, comfortable environment at Cambridge. For us an important part of this is friendship. While we on the welfare team celebrate friendships between all genders, we recognise that when going through a tough period or dealing with certain gender-specific challenges, it is common to feel more comfortable discussing these issues with friends of the same gender. That's why we believe hosting

events designed to appeal to specific groups is beneficial for the welfare of our members, and this was my reason for organising a ladies night formal. The only reason I felt it needed to be exclusive is because swap tickets are limited and always in high demand, so if it were open to all as usual, we would probably end up with the normal 65/35 Churchill ratio of men to women. If we can have women's, LGBT+, and families events to promote bonding and support between the members of those groups, then why shouldn't the men also have similar opportunities? I will let Fabian tell you about the issues he is concerned about for male MCR members, and I fully agree with and support his efforts. We realise these are tricky issues and there will definitely be some who disagree with us, but as individuals who are passionate about gender issues, we are volunteering our time to try to achieve net positives for the MCR. We hope you will allow us to represent you and do our best to make this a welcoming, nurturing environment.

Thanks for your time, Alisha

## **Statement by Tamas Kispeter**

Dear all,

I personally see no issue with gender exclusive events. That said, representation issues are real: for example within the LGBT+ community there has been long and thorough discussion on the overrepresentation of cis white gay men. From this standpoint, considering the gender balance of our college, having fewer male exclusive events than female exclusive is an attempt to fix the overrepresentation of men, which is, depending on execution, commendable.

In particular, I see no issue with a men only bbq. However, while certain of all positive intentions, the communication of that event was, for a lack of a better word, a disaster. "Lad" and "bro" culture, while good intentioned, brings with itself connotations and stereotypes that not only alienate not-men, but men as well. This especially applies to a portion of the LGBT+ community. It appeared as the opposite of an inclusive event, even within the community of men, only appealing to the subset who enjoy the fraternity-style behaviour. Thank you, Tamas

## Statement by Fabian Micallef

Dear Family,

I am here today to bring clarification, progress and change to the nebulous policy of the MCR community with respect to the issues which have been brought to a community-wide attention by the B(ro)BQ incident.

First and foremost and most importantly I completely and unreservedly apologize for causing distress to a section of the community with my use of the word "Bro". I apologise that I did not seek a fellow welfare officer to verify my writing. On a broader level, I apologise that I have alienated a subset of the male community, and on a somewhat unrelated note I apologise for not seeking the treasurer's or college's approval before setting up the event, doing so only immediately after Clara pointed it out.

My position regarding the issues raised is in line with the statement we have carefully developed as a unified welfare team, with our differences and with our shared passion for the welfare of our peers. As far as the word "bro" is concerned, realising that to the effected this is a poor excuse, all I can say is that in my culture there is no stigma or further meaning attached to it.

But back to the meat. The truth is that however minor or insignificant compared to the hurdles and issues of non-men, men have hurdles and issues too. As the Men's Welfare Officer, in the understanding that my job prioritises, and with the above statement is however not exclusive to the needs of men, I am mostly concerned with the needs of men. Men struggle more to keep familial relations when going through tough periods, men too feel acutely the pressures and contrasts of gender roles, traditional or otherwise, male or female enforced, and men commit suicide far more often than women.

From my few months as Men's Welfare Officer men have approached me informally, with loneliness and relationship problems and men have approached me even more informally praising my fun, chill and real approach to the post. I have myself sought, admittedly only once, a conversation with a fellow committee member, where I asked him whether people think I am an asshole, and I am learning from that conversation and I am tweaking my approach but from that conversation I also learned that I should never compromise on my passions, my energy and my candid nature.

And therefore I come to you with my candid intention, an event for men, which I thought harmless since it mirrors an event already approved and

agreed upon for women. The B(ro)BQ was an event marketed disastrously, but one which I am happy to say has exposed some problems and lacunae within the framework in which the welfare team acts. Problems, which I hope will be mitigated if not solved so that we can move on as a stronger, more united, MCR community.

I welcome and relish all comments and criticism. I respect powerfully all comments and people that approach me with the candidness that I myself am approaching you with here. This respect is extended to the understanding that people might feel uncomfortable revealing their identity and as such I highly promote the use of the anonymous email, which enables anyone from the community to engage with me in dialogue with complete anonymity and confidentiality.

If you will permit me a sliver of emotion to shine, in faith that the following paragraph will not undo the good stated above, I will say the following. What I do not respect is when people decide to create, feed and spread hateful on-line communities, of which I am told there is one dedicated just for me, where they reinforce their notions that I am some sort of sexist pig. If we communicate we become stronger and more united, if we surround ourselves by people who think perfectly like us we are doomed to be stuck where we are. I am here bravely challenging mainly myself, but also you, to improve ourselves as the Churchill College MCR Family.

Your brother,  
Fabian.