



St John's College Junior Common Room

Minutes - 4th Meeting, Hilary Term 2021
Sunday 7th March, Zoom, 7:30pm

The meeting opened at 7:40 pm and was chaired by Zara Hussain (Chair), with minutes taken by Aoife Hegarty (Secretary). The JCR also voted to give permission for Alex Foley, the SU VP for Women to attend and speak at this meeting. This JCR meeting was attended by 76 members.

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1. Minutes from the Previous Meeting

[Minutes](#) were received.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

No matters were arising.

3. Reports from Officers, Reps and Committees

Written reports available [here](#).

Naomi Reiter (E&D Officer) reported that they were running another antisemitism training session.

Maya Blanco reported that they had secured the punts for Trinity term.

Entz and the Bike Reps had nothing to report.

The Art, Charities, and Sports reps were not present.

The Welfare Officers reported that they were here, questions were welcome and they were going to speak in the discussion.

4. Ratifications

- Auditors for Hilary term 2021 (2 vacancies)

Talav B stood for auditor. They gave a short hust, noting that they had done the audit twice before and found it fun.

- Facilities Rep (1 vacancy)

No one stood.

5. Items for Discussion

a) Covid-19 Response

- Emmet O'Leary opened this discussion with a brief speech. They said that the JCR is both inward and outward facing, looking to both care for its members through welfare provision and to give a sense of community, and to campaign to improve policy. Emmet meets with the President and the Bursar to communicate how "life is not great for students" and say that we need support. Sometimes we don't get what we want, and it feels like we are not being listened to. Emmet said that think that the JCR helps college realise what life in college is like. Phil gave a speech at the last Governing Body meeting in Michelmas and gave college a perspective of what student life is like now, and how lonely it is. College is willing to listen, but not to act. Emmet highlighted the work of the welfare Officers and the SU, who are advocating for future policy and to hold college to

account for past actions. They said that Alex Foley (SU VP for Women) will be able to give advice and is going to speak. Emmet said that they do not have more power than you do- this meeting is the supreme power, you're in charge. The JCR is a collective. You're their boss. They asked members to vent and said that nothing was unconstructive.

- Jake Hatton (Academic Affairs Officer) spoke about the Educational Policy meeting which they had attended. The meeting had moved on to discuss student feeling. Jake was disappointed by the attitude displayed by senior staff and felt that they had been dismissive of student concerns. College is struggling to maintain community support. Jake noted that Freshers were turning towards their tutors for help, who were their main point of contact with college. College staff noted the low levels of attendance at online events and felt that students were not engaging with the support which was being provided. College recognised that there has been frustration at their enforcement of their policy on college grounds. Jake encouraged JCR members to give their feedback and said that the JCR would need to take the lead and communicate effectively.
- Alex Foley (SU VP for Women): Alex said that they were not going to be so diplomatic. They are working with Emmet and the Welfare Officers. The background to their involvement is that it began around the guidelines which were published on the 6th of January and the college's response to these guidelines. They'd collated different college's responses and looked at statements which were out of step with university and government guidelines. Colleges had arbitrary guidelines. St. John's was flagged because of student concerns about the process to return back, and the email which had told students not to apply to return despite college taking applications. They think college's policy was discriminatory. They think that students are being reasonable. They think college is violating the Equality Act. They met with Michelle Donlan, and noted that most colleges did get in line with uni guidance. They emailed Maggie Snowling, Elizabeth and Eileen Marston. Alex noted that they had then received an internal email in error. They were not happy with college's response or attitude, and gave some descriptions of incidents which had led to this feeling. They asserted the right of the SU to represent us, as students. They outlined their next actions, and encouraged JCR members to contact the SU's advice centre for help if they had any questions about their rights as a student or were struggling in general. They will organise a further meeting with the JCR.

The discussion was then opened to members of the JCR. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- College's policy disproportionately affected students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The JCR was especially concerned about the recent decision to charge full rent over the vacation and the justification which was given for this decision. The JCR noted that STEM subjects had a higher percentage of students from state-schools, and were more likely to be back in college for practicals. The decision to charge full rent was not in line with other colleges, and the JCR noted other colleges which were waiving rent or giving significant discounts.

- The JCR again noted the lasting hurt caused by college's policy around A-level results and students who would not "flourish", and asked what kind of discussions were being had about the current offer-holders.
 - The JCR President said that they would be sure to raise these issues. They said that government guidelines were changing and the situation was fluid, and that they would ask college for a rent reduction. They hoped that college would not use the recent guidelines to force us out, but thought that this was unlikely. They are going to meet the Senior Bursar.
- The JCR also noted that Maggie Snowling is the Chair of the Conference of Colleges this year.
- In the chat, we then noted that travel on short notice was especially difficult for domestic students who did not live in England or Wales, and linked an article on the government guidelines.
- The Welfare Officers then spoke. They noted that their election pages were difficult to implement with the term being online. They said that their job wasn't just to pidge-a-memory, and they were also doing lots of work behind the scenes. They were meeting with Maggie Snowling, Elizabeth, and Alex Foley. They were pushing for changes in welfare, and noted that the President had suggested a Welfare Hub. The Hub would be a space where students could go and where further support would be signposted. This Hub would be separate from the Welfare Dean, and would be impartial. They also noted that college were hiring another counsellor, who was principally for staff, but who would be available for students to book. They had passed on the issues which students had had about the college counsellor not being available at the agreed appointment times, and said that college were looking into these concerns. They went on to mention some concerns around anonymous feedback to college being disregarded. They also mentioned that group counselling sessions had been suggested post-COVID. They said that it did feel like changes were being made, and that these changes should begin to come into affect in Trinity and Michaelmas.
- The JCR then said that students might not be attending college's online events because of the long periods of time which students were spending in front of their screens. It was noted that activities like yoga and journaling could be pursued by students using existing online videos or without any screen. It was felt that students turned to college for help with changing their material circumstances rather than online events.
- The JCR did not feel that it was valid for the college to dismiss student surveys on the grounds of small sample size.
- It was noted that the importance which college placed on "being in line with other colleges" was fluid, and that this was important "when it suits them".
- It was noted that Freshers had no experience of life in St John's before COVID-19, and the JCR encouraged first years to speak at this meeting.
- SU Alex plugged the SU advice service again, and said that this was a really good place to go if you felt a bit daunted to complain, and that the SU have won cases.
- The JCR then noted that tutors present at meetings where the results of the student survey had been presented had been interested to read the report. The President had suggested that they not do so, as 50 was not a "meaningful" sample size and the results could be upsetting to staff.

- The JCR noted that the President was “obsessive” about staff mental health, and it was felt that this sometimes was used to avoid having to take student concerns seriously.
- It was by a JCR enthusiast that:
 - It is frustrating to run online events and have low attendance. This is something which students have also been facing as they organise events this year- students had met this with grace, asking for feedback and saying “I’m sorry that this wasn’t what you wanted. I tried my best. What can I do better in the future?”.
 - The Junior Deans are paid to fulfill a welfare role. This role could be more active, and they could plan more events. It was noted that this was an actionable thing.
 - It was upsetting to be lied to. The college communication was not good. This enthusiast had given up on returning. They had been told that they would return, told that this return would happen by 5th week, told that they would be emailed on Monday. They had stopped believing in what college said and said that communication was inconsistent. They suggested that college could ask students what communication was effective, and for more help in drafting communication. “If you don’t know the answer, don’t lie!”
 - If you are going to make a formal complaint, bring someone with you. Ask any of the Officers, and you can say that they are there in their official capacity. Having a friend there is a really good support, and if you have a witness, they cannot say that they do not care about you to your face. It was noted that after making a complaint, college were patronising, but were nicer.
- It was then noted that the President’s concern over the counsellor not showing up for appointments seemed to be related to monetary concerns, rather than student welfare.
- It was noted that the Welfare Dean wanted students to suggest events, and that they felt it was hard to think of things to do. It was noted that group counselling was not suitable for the college environment, and that college do not realise how personal this can be.
- Concerns were raised about the specific difficulties facing international students. It was noted that booking travel on short notice is expensive and difficult, and that the dates to return to college did not factor in isolation periods. It was requested that college provide more information about isolating in college.
 - In response to this, the international rep confirmed that they were working on these guidelines, and said that it was difficult and lonely staying in college for extended lengths of time. They encouraged international students to come to them with concerns. They would raise the question of financial help for students isolating and noted that financial support was something which college should be able to help with. They also would ask for increased communication from college around these issues.
- The JCR questioned the date for return, the 6th of April. Emmet replied that this was the day after the end of the vac.
- A question was then asked about the college’s drug and alcohol policy. Following the tragic death of Daniel Mervis, the inquest had raised serious concerns with St John’s drug policy.
 - Emmet said that they and the Welfare Officers would continue the work of the previous Welfare Officers and push for a more realistic drug policy.

- It was also noted that Amelia Holt works on a uni-wide drug policy and that harm reduction materials should now be available on the SU's website.
- A question was then asked about releasing the report which Emmet had compiled based on the feedback given.
 - It was then noted that these comments had been made without that purpose in mind.
- The JCR reiterated its concern that the President did not take anonymous feedback seriously.
- It was requested that first years be given an earlier date to return because of Prelims. It was noted that staying at home could have a negative impact on exam performance.
- It was noted that the JCR meetings were the best way to address concerns.
- It was noted that college had not known its own vac res policy on Wednesday or what the return to college would look like.
- It was said that college decision-making had been poor and there could be more contingency planning, but it was recognized that the situation changed quickly.
- A question was asked about how college were going to address the difference in Finalists' circumstances and how this would affect their grades. It was noted that finalists in residence had library access, and that Magdalene has 400 students back in residence.
 - Jake said that this would be done through the mitigating circumstances, and that the university was planning to [do something very technical around shifting the mean and the spread of marks to be consistent with previous years to normalise marks across the university] (this has been butchered by the Secretary in minute-taking, please contact Jake Hatton for more accurate information).
- A question asked if the SU knew anything about the government's guidelines about travelling in the vac. Students were concerned that college might use this as an excuse to kick students out over the vac, and asked that anyone who met with college staff advocate for students currently in residence.
 - Alex Foley didn't know much, but the Vice Chancellor was keen to get students back as soon as possible.
- It was asked if the second college counsellor would have the capacity to give students longer-term support, or if you could max out on sessions like with the current counsellor and the uni service.
 - The Welfare Officers would look into this, but believed that this would be the case with both counsellors.
 - It was noted that the current counsellor was not great over email.
 - It was stressed that the energy spent planning online events would be better spent advertising more sustainable counselling.
 - The Welfare Officers would communicate this, and said that people needed a map of where to go for support.
 - A question was asked about college's justification for not allowing a return for academic reasons but allowing vac res to be used.
 - Jake has asked about this, and says that they were told that college was keen to avoid "people coming back for the wrong reasons" and that college were concerned about people returning for the "social life".

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- A question was then asked about the JCR hardship fund. The Senior Dean is requesting that the normal hardship form be filled out, but some questions were not relevant to the current situation as students are being asked to pay upwards of £800 rent for the vac. It was requested that a separate form be made.
 - Emmet thinks the hardship form and the vac res form should be integrated. They will ask about a rent discount. They'll also ask about the possibility of delayed billing for this vac res.
- A question was asked if there was any general vibe about the return of second years.
 - It was noted that college do eventually want people back, and hopefully we will be back in Trinity.
- A question asked if there was a way to hold college to account for allowing some students back, and some students not when they had applied to return for the same reason, eg building work.
 - Alex Foley said that they would hold a session about filing a joint complaint. They think that this might need for you to already have exhausted the appeals process.
 - It was also noted that although the college says that they are not taking applications to return, the university says that applications on the grounds of mental health reasons should be on a rolling basis.
 - It was mentioned that going to the OFS would be a good option, and that the uni would probably come down hard on college following this.
- The JCR said that there was a sense that college were waiting students out, and knew that we would lose momentum over the vac and during exam season.
- It was commented that it was strange that college were trying to silence student feedback in the form of the survey, and it was suggested that we repeat the survey and circulate the results.
 - In response to this, it was noted that tutors were subject to college policy in the same way. The tutors are sympathetic, but are being used as a point of contact for all college matters and are taking on pastoral and emotional support. Given this high workload, it was said that perhaps we should be hesitant in bringing tutors on side and that it may not be their responsibility to break down the administrative barriers.
- It was asked how we could hold college to account and ensure that they follow government guidelines.
 - Alex Foley has emailed the Universities Minister. If you do qualify on government guidelines and are not being allowed to return, please contact Tucker Drew, the VP for Academic Affairs. Their email is on the SU website and they are very approachable and nice.
 - It was noted that some decisions are being made by faculties, who must choose which students should be allowed to return, as with the engineering faculty.
- It was asked that college rethink its policy with regards to students with in-person exams on the 30th of April.
 - Emmet said to email Eileen Marston if this applied to you, and said that they will follow this up.

- It was noted that this was the case for second year medics, who were told they could return on the 26th.
- A question asked why SJC was so bad, and specifically so much worse than other colleges.
 - It was suggested that a contributing factor might be that we do not have a deer park.
- Emmet then summarised the actions which they would take following this meeting, and responding to the concerns raised.

6. Agenda Items

a) The “Let Me In!” Financial Motion

Proposer: Ruksar Hussain

Seconded: Aoife Hegarty

Ruksar Hussain gave a short speech in favour of this motion. There were no questions or items for discussion.

This motion **passed**.

b) The Disability Awareness Standing Policy Motion

Proposer: Alice Hackney (Disabilities rep)

Seconded: Emmet O’Leary (JCR President)

Alice Hackney gave a short speech in favour of this motion.

Lachlan Hinley asked if the idea behind item was (d) was that individuals ask about specific adjustments when the event is organised, and asked how this would work. Alice noted that not all disabilities were visible, and that not all people were vocal about their needs and that it could be difficult to come forward and say “I need this”. In an ideal world, everything would be accessible all the time, but that the next best thing was to listen to individuals and make adjustments. It would come down to individuals to message the event organisers or the Disabilities Rep. Ideally, the organisers would disclose the accessibility before the event (eg. “this quiz has audio and visual questions”), and Alice noted that the uncertainty around the accessibility of events was a big barrier.

Zara Hussain noted that when they were organising freshers week events, they had asked college for permission to ask students to disclose any accessibility requirements which they had. College had refused this request on the grounds of data protection. It was suggested that a box be added to the signup sheets for future events, asking if you would like to disclose any requirements.

Alice said that this is the only way to go about it. This would ideally be data-based, and they noted that they had had difficulty organising a Disabilities Buddy scheme, pairing different year groups, because of this data protection issue.

Zara Hussain suggested an amendment be made to the 'Beliefs' section, saying "When organising JCR events, a box should be present on forms to allow JCR members to disclose any accessibility requirements."

This was accepted as **friendly**.

This motion **passed**.

7. Any Other Business

Emmet O'Leary brought this standing policy motion.

The "Covid-19 policy is a thing" Standing Policy Motion.

This JCR notes that:

- a) Covid-19 policy is a big issue for members of the JCR

This JCR believes that:

- b) The President should represent members' views and concerns to the College

This JCR resolves to:

- c) Mandate the JCR President to take account of the following list of concerns in conversation with the College about Covid-19 policy:
 - i) Rent discount for those who stay (50-75% rate) / special circumstances
 - ii) Not force people to go home
 - iii) Centre assessed grade scenario/grade approach and comms
 - iv) Drug policy and SJC inquest – drug testing, language used
 - v) International students, Brexit feeling
 - vi) Sufficient notice for internationals to return
 - vii) Sufficient time for quarantine for internationals
 - viii) Keep contact with welfare officers
 - ix) Better advertise college welfare provision
 - x) Language of counselling as sustained process
 - xi) Junior deans can be more visible, more approachable/present/not just disciplinary
 - xii) First years with prelims having priority for return
 - xiii) Freshers being as important as other members of JCR
 - xiv) Provisions for those currently in residence, welfare provisions e.g. Bubbles of decent size, flexible with changing guidelines
 - xv) Survey made clear that could be circulated to more groups of people (in Trinity)
- d) Add the item above to Standing Policy as 'Implementing Resolutions'.

The JCR briefly discussed the membership of the JCR maillist.

Naomi Reiter noted that the antisemitism workshop is completely apolitical and encouraged students to attend.