

# QJCR Submission to the Stewards Committee

## Formal Hall

Attendance figures for Junior Members at Formal Hall have seen a dramatic decline at Queens' since Michaelmas Term 2007.

Less frequent engagement in the social aspects of formal hall is seen to have played an integral part in the weakening of a sense of a strong college community. This is a connection that has been cited by a number of JCR members.

Discussions amongst JCR members and at a recent meeting of the College Union, along with a recent Poll of students, represent a concerted effort to establish the causes of this problem and to consider some potential solutions.

### Key Questions to the Stewards Committee

- **Is the JCR's concern over attendance figures at Formal Hall echoed by the members of the Stewards Committee?**
- **Does the Stewards Committee agree with the JCR's views on the causes of a decrease in attendance?**
- **Can the Stewards Committee offer any further insight or statistical information relating to changes observed at Formal Hall since the start of Michaelmas Term 2007?**
- *Senior members of the College Union advised the JCR and MCR that support from the Stewards Committee would significantly strengthen any attempts made by student representatives to address concerns: **Would the Stewards Committee support an attempt by the JCR and MCR to raise the issues detailed above with the relevant parties in the hope that a suitable solution can be found as soon as possible?***

**Three key reasons for the decline in attendance have been identified by JCR members:**

- Difficulties experienced in coordinating large groups or special event
- Alcohol restrictions: the privilege for Queens' members to bring one bottle of wine per person to hall is wholeheartedly appreciated. However, preventing guests from bringing alcohol into formal hall discourages Queens' students from considering formal hall as a location, both for those extremely valuable inter-collegiate social occasions and also for entertaining visitors to Cambridge
- Opacity of new cashless booking system

Ultimately, Queens' Formal Hall is now seen as a less-attractive and overly restrictive place in which students may socialise, both with their friends, colleagues and members of other colleges. Inevitably, this has led to an overall shift of students' sociable activities away from Queens' College, thus weakening the sense of a collective undergraduate community.

Any resultant impact upon behaviour and alcohol consumption in Formal Hall has most likely been the result of a general decline in numbers, rather than a particular increase in conscientious conduct. Many members of the JCR and MCR, as well as some members of the SCR, agreed that improvements in behaviour could have been achieved without limiting alcohol consumption, in line with earlier proposals for a new Code of Conduct, submitted in Easter Term 2007 after extensive consultation of the student body.

### **Other Colleges**

At other colleges, reports are to the contrary – they are struggling to deal with the demand for formal hall tickets. For example, Selwyn College experiences hour-long queues whenever tickets become available. Attendance is consistently high at many other colleges, as reported in person by their respective JCR Presidents at a recent CUSU discussion of Formal Hall, where 21 undergraduate colleges were represented.

Other colleges also have occasional special formals, coordinated by their JCRs, e.g. for charitable purposes, mixed JCR/MCR/SCR formals, themed formals, special 'swap' formals, etc. At Queens' actively discourages such events by making them extremely difficult to coordinate, except via 'unofficial' routes. For example, a fund-raising formal proposed by the JCR Welfare Committee, open to all members of the College, was denied official permission and was consequently unable to go ahead.

### **Recent discussion and survey of JCR members**

A new forum for discussion of this issue was launched on the JCR Website on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> January. A pleasing response has already been received and many insightful comments have been made. The below summarises some of the key points.

#### **Survey: "Formal Hall - what is the biggest reason for the decline in numbers?"**

##### **Results (90 participants\*)**

- =1. Online booking system (29%)
- =1. Wine restrictions for guests (29%)
3. No advance booking for groups/special occasions (26%)
4. Food quality (8%)
5. Price (4%)
6. None of the above (3%)
7. No major change seen (1%)

(\*Accurate at 8.30pm, Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2008)

A total of 86% of those surveyed believed that the three most recent changes to Formal Hall had made the most profound impact on attendance figures.

A number of student comments can be viewed on the JCR Website.

The JCR looks forward to the discussion of the above with the Stewards Committee on Thursday 31st January.