

Class Act Officer Motion

Proposed by: Eleanor Beswick

Seconded by: Ursula Eastwood

This JCR notes that:

1. State-comprehensive educated, working-class, low-income, first-generation university, care leaver and estranged students (henceforth referred to as “Class Act Students”) make up a significant proportion of the Worcester student body.
2. Class Act students often feel alienated at university:
 - a. Reclaim’s Educating All report¹, which includes a survey of students from top Russell Group universities, including Oxford, showed that over 70% of the respondents who identified as working class agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “your class was a barrier when integrating at university”.
 - b. According to the same survey, 78.4% of respondents who identified as working class felt they did not fit in at university, compared to 27.6% of people who did not identify as working class.
3. The Oxford Student Union recognises that more needs to be done to address the issues of class, socioeconomic, and educational privilege at Oxford University: Oxford SU’s Class Act campaign seeks to campaign on behalf of, create a space for, and represent the views of Class Act students.
4. One of the aims identified by this campaign is the creation of Class Act officers on JCR committees to represent these students.
5. There already exist representatives in the Worcester JCR for other under-represented groups, such as the Ethnic and Religious Minorities Rep, the LGBTQ+ Rep, the Students with Disabilities Rep, the International Students Rep, and the Gender Equality Rep.
6. The mandate of the Access and Admissions Rep in the Constitution of the Worcester College JCR makes little reference to representing these Class Act students: Article 18.i.6 mandates that the Access and Admissions officer shall “organise two JCR-led open days with the Social Mobility Foundation in Trinity Term”, but there is no explicit reference to representing the interests of students from a Class Act background.
7. The Access Rep was amongst the most contested hustings for the JCR committee.

This JCR believes that:

1. The work done by individual colleges and the university to support students from disadvantaged or minority groups often does not adequately address class, financial or academic background.
2. That as a constituent college of the University of Oxford, Worcester College has a role to play in the addressing of this issue in the university.
3. That working class, low income, state comprehensive school-educated and first-generation students do not only face barriers to reaching Oxford, but also face specific issues once they are here, which are spoken of much less and are largely unaddressed.
4. That these barriers are not just faced at the university level, but in college life too.
5. That although financial support exists to a degree, pastoral support is less present, and that financial support alone is inadequate to address the difficulties these students face when they reach Oxford.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/oxfordsuclassact>; page description. [Accessed 30/10/2020]

6. That while the Oxford SU's Class Act campaign is university-wide, one of the primary means it has of achieving goals in the collegiate university is via the creation of roles on JCR committees, that can push change in college more easily.
7. That the creation of an officer to represent these students will far better allow the JCR to work for them:
 - a. The officer can offer support and advice about navigating the often-complex processes to apply for financial support at College and in the wider University.
 - b. College events could be organised to allow these students to meet people with similar backgrounds to them within the college, rather than having to go outside college to find a space to discuss shared problems and experiences.
 - c. The visibility of such a role can help combat the sense of alienation these students can experience at Oxford.
 - d. There would be a specific person to approach about the difficulties of being at Oxford as a working class, low income, state comprehensive school-educated and first generation student which will serve as a significant welfare asset, because such people can be difficult to identify currently.
 - e. These students would be given an explicit voice in issues and debates within the common room – e.g. discussions of rent proposals, the results of which are perhaps likely to be most relevant to these students.
 - f. The creation of a mandate for a Class Act Officer would send an explicit message of support to Class Act, and it would demonstrate our agreement with its objectives.
 - g. That adding the remit of representing of working class, low income, state comprehensive school-educated, first generation students and care leavers and estranged students to another role would require too much time of anyone who held that role, and would provide a far less significant platform for the voicing and addressing of the issues of these students.

This JCR resolves to:

1. Propose the idea of a Class Act Officer to College.
2. If this is approved, to propose a constitutional motion to amend the constitution so that it includes a mandate for a Class Act Officer, with hustings to take place as soon as reasonably possible.