



**MERTON COLLEGE  
EQUALITY REPORT  
2023-24**

This report describes some of the actions Merton undertook to promote equality in 2023-24.

### *Equality Adviser*

Dr Mar Astrid Rodda (Leventis Research Fellow) took on the role of Equality Adviser in Michaelmas Term 2023.

The brief of the role is to:

- Assist with the progression of Merton's equality objectives for the whole range of protected characteristics.
- Advocate on equality and diversity matters; promote their consideration in College committees; and maintain an awareness of the University's work in this area.
- Advise and contribute to papers and relevant processes.
- Work with staff and student equality representatives.
- Convene equalities-related events including the annual Equality Conversation.
- Attend the termly Equality Forum.
- Attend the termly Welfare Forum, if wished.

The Equality Adviser also oversees the allocation of funding to student events under the Tri-College Equality and Diversity grants scheme.

### *Equality Forum*

The College Equality Forum continues to meet on a termly basis. Details of events or activities (either past or forthcoming) of potential interest to the group and the wider Merton community are included on the agenda. Forum members are also sent the termly Equality and Diversity Newsletter, compiled by the University's Equality and Diversity Unit.

### *Equality Conversation*

The ninth annual Merton Equality Conversation took place on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023. The speaker was Tim Soutphommasane, the Chief Diversity Officer at the University of Oxford. He discussed issues of immigration, equality and inclusion in liberal democracies, drawing from his rich experience as both a political theorist, previously at the University of Sydney, and as Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner from 2013-2018.

### *JCR Equality Forum*

The JCR officers with a brief for equality (Gender Equality Representative, the Access and Equal Opportunities Representative, the International Students' Representative, the BME Representative, the Disabled Students' Representative, the Social Backgrounds Representative, the LGBTQIA+ Representative and the Transgender Representative) continue to meet and pass on matters of concern to the College Equality Forum.

### *Diversity in College portraiture*

Photographic portraits of senior current fellows are now hanging in the Fellows V staircase, and the portrait drawings have been relocated to Fellows III staircase. The portraits of Ulrike Tillmann and Stuart Hall are now both on display in the Hall. The Pictures and Chattels committee are developing a project to improve the visual environment of additional seminar rooms, which will include E & D considerations, and are also seeking an appropriate place to hang the portraits of three women Junior Research Fellows, drawn by Rebecca Fortnum, one of the first VRFs in the Creative Arts.

#### *HR Manager and HR Committee*

The Human Resources Manager, Fiona Lawrence, continues to strengthen the College's practice in areas including recruitment and selection; induction of new staff; parental leave; and staff communication and engagement. The HR Committee continues to meet on a termly basis to discuss general issues pertaining to policy and practice and future legislative changes. New advertising strategies have been trialled for staff vacancies to improve the diversity of the applicant pool.

#### *Complaints and Feedback*

The Equality Forum has continued its practice of reviewing complaints and feedback on equality matters (College officers and chairs and convenors of committees are asked for details before each term's meeting).

#### *Disability and Access*

The College continues its programme of work to increase accessibility including the Disability Fund which students can use to purchase study-related equipment not covered by their Disabled Students' Allowance.

Merton has a full entry in the University's Access Guide. This is a useful resource for any and all visitors to the College, as well as new staff members and students (see <https://www.accessguide.ox.ac.uk/merton-college-0>).

Both the JCR and MCR have Disability Reps who raise concerns with the Disability Coordinator and provide advice and support to all disabled students. The JCR Disability Rep initiated a disability mentoring scheme which links disabled freshers with on-course students who could support and advise them, and the mentors have also provided information to prospective applicants with disabilities. The Acting Head of Welfare and Assistant Chaplain host a Neurodiversity Lunch on alternate weeks during term, providing a relaxed space for anyone with or exploring neurodivergence to share experiences, ask questions, and find support.

The College held a Disability Formal Hall in Trinity Term as part of a series of Formal Halls recognising and celebrating the diversity of our community, with provision for students to manage aspects of their meal choice or bring their own food.

#### *Gender and Transgender*

Merton staff were trained on trans issues given by Gendered Intelligence in March 2022. The group included key staff members from the Lodge, Academic Office, Warden's Office, Finance and Domestic Bursaries, Library, Welfare Team, Development Office, and HR. Two additional unisex toilet facilities are now available in the Finley Building.

The JCR has added a Transgender Rep to their Committee represent and advance the interests of current genderqueer undergraduates.

The Gender Expression Fund provides small grants to assist any junior member to purchase items of clothing which support and affirm their gender identity.

### *Race*

Merton participated in the Merton Street Colleges (Corpus, Christ Church, Merton, Oriel and Univ) an event to welcome black freshers to the University at the start of the academic year.

The College used the University Counselling Service's peer support training programme again this year. This means that Merton peer supporters are now able to participate in the University-wide "Rainbow Peers" and "Peers of Colours" and Disability Peers schemes.

Together with the Faculty of Law, Merton offers a three-year DPhil Law BAME Scholarship for UK-resident candidates who are members of Black and Minority Ethnic groups; this covers their course fee and a grant for living expenses. The College also supports a DPhil student through the Black Academic Futures scheme.

### *LGBTQ+*

Both JCR and MCR have an LGBTQ+ officer to provide better representation of the student body.

The third Pride Formal was held in June 2024, followed by dessert hosted by the JCR & MCR LGBTQ+ reps.

The College is now licensed to celebrate Civil Marriages and Civil Partnerships.

### *Sexual Consent*

Talks on sexual consent for freshers have been included in the MCR and JCR Freshers' Week programmes for the last ten years. This year, these were run by the Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Centre.

### *Faith*

Halal and kosher meals continue to be available to order in Hall. A Formal Hall was held to celebrate Hanukkah was held in Michaelmas Term 2022, and a member of the Jewish community gave an address at Evensong in Hilary Term 2023.

The Warden held informal conversations in Trinity Term with members of the College's Jewish and Muslim communities about their experiences at Merton, which were also attended by local faith leaders.

The College has a multi-faith prayer room with provided are a hand basin and wudu washing station: the adjoining room has an armchair and bean bag among the soft furnishings. Dimmable lighting, prayer mats and LED candles have also been added.

### *Library*

The Equality and Diversity collection is now an established open-access collection with new publications added. Recommendations from members of the college are welcomed. All protected characteristics are covered, and there are a number of works dealing with intersectionality.

Academic Registrar & Senior Tutor  
November 2024