This report describes some of the actions Merton undertook to promote equality in 2017-18.

Equality Adviser
Dr Bassel Tarbush (Fellow and Tutor in Economics) took on the role of Equality Adviser in Michaelmas Term 2017.

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.

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 fifth annual Merton Equality Conversation took the theme “Beyond the Headlines: Muslim women on identities, opportunities, and structural challenges in Britain today”. The speakers were journalist Shaista Aziz, Oxford University research fellow Asma Mustafa, and OUSU VP Farheen Ahmed. Further details and a recording of the event are available at https://www.merton.ox.ac.uk/event/merton-equality-conversation-2018

JCR Equality Forum

Diversity in College portraiture
A working group has been convened to discuss the issue of equality and diversity in relation to portraiture at Merton. The group comprises members of both the Sub-Committee on Pictures and Historic Chattels and the Equality Forum, and representatives from staff, MCR, and JCR. In 2017-18 a new location has been agreed for the tapestry in the Lodge, and a shortlist of photographers for the early career fellow portraits has been drawn up. Other initiatives are ongoing.

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. In 2017-18 the work of the HR Committee has had a particular focus on the gender pay gap.

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 which in 2017-18 has included installation of a ramp and power-assisted entrance to the Academic Office. In 2018, the Deputy Librarian carried out a useful inventory of all accessibility equipment held by the library, and made additional purchases where appropriate. This equipment, available to any user of the Merton libraries, includes coloured overlays, magnifying glasses and sheets, support cushions, standing desks, adjustable seating and a hearing loop.

Signposting of support for disabled students has been improved by expanding and updating the information available on the intranet, and by producing a disability ‘FAQ’ leaflet that is available in the post room, nurse’s waiting room etc.

Merton is one of only three Oxford colleges to have a full entry in the University’s Access Guide: http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/access/colleges/merton/. The Access Guide is a useful resource for any and all visitors to the College, as well as new staff members and students. It has been updated to include information and a photograph of the new lift (see http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/access/colleges/merton/).

The College also hosted the University’s annual Disability Lecture in 2018. The lecture was given by poet Gwyneth Lewis on her first non-fiction book about depression.

In 2018 the JCR created a new Disability Rep position, currently held by Charlotte Green. The Disability Rep raises concerns with the Disability Coordinator and provides advice and support to all disabled students.

Gender and Transgender
The Warden & Tutors’ Committee continues to explore the gender gap in performance at FPE and FHS. In 2017-18 a number of activities took place on this theme, including a discussion meeting with Professors Deborah Cameron and Mindy Chen-Wishart on the gender dynamic in tutorials, and a pilot of ‘Action Learning Sets’ to encourage peer-to-peer problem solving amongst female students.

The organisation Gendered Intelligence delivered two trans awareness training sessions for College staff, which were very well received.

Race
Ruth Ramsden-Karelse joined Merton as the inaugural Stuart Hall Doctoral Scholar. Ruth is working on a DPhil project on drag performance in Cape Coloured communities in South Africa since 1950. She attends the Equality Forum and has been active in organising the Queer Studies research network.

Also in conjunction with the Stuart Hall Foundation, a screening of Raoul Peck’s film ‘I Am Not Your Negro’ took place on 18 October 2017 in the TS Eliot Lecture Theatre. The screening, which was extremely well attended, was followed by a conversation about race and resistance, and the role of the intellectual as dissident, with Caryl Phillips and Isaac Julien.

On 8 June 2018, the College marked the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush with a public lecture by Hakim Adi, Professor of the History of Africa and the African Diaspora, on “The Empire Windrush and Black British History”.

The Equality Advisor is continuing to work with his counterparts at Corpus and Oriel in seeking to develop a shared BAME infrastructure across the three colleges. The Tri-College Network has broadened from its original scope (BME students) and now encompasses all aspects of equality and diversity. Each of the three colleges has agreed to contribute to a fund for student-run equality events, although the eligibility criteria had yet to be decided.

The JCR has now created two separate posts, BME Rep and International Students Rep, to reflect the differences between these two student communities.

LGBTQ+
The MCR Freshers’ Week programme was reviewed for Michaelmas Term 2018, with a new, optional, LGBTQ+ 101 workshop added after the sexual consent workshop.

The MCR is hoping to create an LGBT+ officer to provide better representation of the student body. College has provided a venue for the Queer Studies research network, organised by Ms Ramsden-Karelse, which has been very well attended.

College decided to fly the rainbow flag for the full duration of LGBT History Month in 2018 and received positive feedback from students. Several joint LGBT events have been organised with other colleges, including a JCR brunch and an MCR drinks evening.

Sexual Consent
Non-mandatory workshops on sexual consent for freshers have been included in the MCR and JCR Freshers’ Week programmes for the last five years. Both JCR and MCR now use the same format for the workshops to encourage attendance.

Faith
Halal and kosher meals continue to be available to order in Hall.

Mr Jasvir Singh OBE of City Sikhs gave the address at Evensong in February. Members of the Sikh community in Oxford were invited to dinner in College.
As part of a termly lecture series, *Merton Conversations in Faith and Culture*, Christina Beardsley (speaker, writer, and activist for trans inclusion in the Church) spoke about her life as a trans woman who is also a Christian priest.

Academic Registrar & Senior Tutor  
November 2018