Dear new colleagues,

I’m writing to welcome you to the St Peter’s Senior Common Room (SCR), and to offer some information that you may find useful.

The SCR is made up everyone who has a teaching, research or senior administrative role within the college. It offers a space to have tea and coffee and read the papers, a venue for social events, and a place to bring and to meet colleagues from different disciplines and areas of University life. I hope that you will enjoy being part of our community, and I look forward to getting to know you better.

As a physical location, the SCR is made up of two rooms situated under the college’s Hall. The first room is supplied with newspapers, coffee and tea. There is also a drinks cabinet, kept stocked by the Wine Steward (currently Dr Peter Kail). If you take any of the spirits from there, please sign for it on the sheet provided.

Many people gather in the SCR for coffee after lunch, and we hope that you will use the room as a place to relax, read and entertain guests. The second room is used as a dining room, and is where smaller, private dinners are held. It also serves as the venue for ‘dessert’ at guest nights (more later on this).

Your individual dining rights will be detailed in your contract letter from the College Registrar (now, Catherine Whalley; previously, Olivia Henley). The information in my letter relates to some of the practicalities and traditions around the SCR and dining in college. I hope it will be helpful, especially if you are new to Oxford.

1. Informal Meals

During term time, breakfast, lunch and dinner are served in Hall. Feel free to jump ahead of the students in the queue. The times of meals are subject to variation from time to time, and a list is kept in the SCR.

**Breakfast** is served from 7 to 9am (with a hot breakfast served from 8am), **lunch** from 12.00 to 1.30 and **dinner** from 5.30 to 7.30pm. At the weekends there is no breakfast, but brunch is available from 10am. All staff may come to lunch between 12-1.30, and for dinner at 6-7pm. The convention with seating is that members should take the first free chair on High Table. If
High Table is full, as it often is at lunchtime, the small table on the left hand side of the main Hall is also reserved for SCR use.

Guests are welcome at all of these meals, and you should sign them in on the list kept by the Hall staff – please indicate if you are paying for your guest yourself, or if the guest is on college business. If you bring a guest in and wish to talk to them separately, feel free to move to your own area of the table, or use the lower table.

The arrangements outside of term time generally follow this model, except that the times may be more restricted, and at very quiet times of the year the catering staff may ask you to sign in for meals.

2. Formal Meals

As well as these ‘informal’ meals, during term time there are more formal dinners, currently on Tuesdays and Thursdays. To attend these, you must register online by 10am the day before.

Please use the link https://v1.bookwhen.com/spc-scr and the password SCR.

These dinners begin at 7.30pm, and there are drinks in the SCR from 7.00pm. Though St Peter’s is generally an informal college, as in most other Oxford colleges the dress code for these dinners is that academic gowns should be worn by members of St Peter’s, and that dress should be smart (i.e. not jeans, but rather jacket and tie for men, smartish outfit for women).

The Master, Vice Master or most senior fellow present (by date of appointment) presides at dinner. That means that he or she is responsible for banging the gavel (a small wooden hammer) to indicate the start of the meal, and reading the college grace (which is printed on a card in both English and Latin), although in practice this is usually delegated to a student.
They are also responsible for saying the closing grace (‘Benedicto benedicatur’) at the end of the meal. On occasions when the full grace is not appropriate, the much shorter ‘Benedictus benedicit’ may be used at the start of the meal instead.\footnote{Benedictus benedicit means ‘May the Blessed One give a blessing’. Benedicto benedicatur means ‘Let praise be given to the Blessed One’.

You should stand up when the gavel is banged.

On Tuesdays we invite 10 members of the Middle Common Room (i.e., the college’s graduate students) to dine with the members of the SCR on High Table. After dinner, there will be port and coffee laid out in the SCR. Tuesday evenings are a good way to integrate with the graduate community, although that shouldn’t deter those who have no formal interaction with graduates. Although it is a more informal dining experience than the Thursday guest nights, it is nevertheless an excellent occasion and guests are welcome then also. There is also free wine for SCR members as a further enticement to participate!

In addition to these regular Formal Halls, there will be various other dinners organised by the SCR Committee during the year. The invitations to these will tell you about any special dress codes and other arrangements.

3. Guest Nights

Guests are always welcome, but Thursdays during term are explicitly ‘guest nights’ when we are served more elaborate food and wine, and when a separate dessert is served after dinner in the SCR (N.B. take the napkin you were using at dinner down to the SCR with you). Seating plans are provided for both dinner and dessert – the general principle is that you will sit with your own guest during dinner, and someone else’s guest during dessert.

It is also a convention that over the course of the dinner you speak to diners on either side of you (it is quite hard to talk to both at the same time). At the moment, the acoustic in the main hall also prevents easy conversation across the high table, so don’t worry about shouting across it!

Dessert itself, which confusingly follows the pudding served upstairs, takes place downstairs in the SCR Dining Room. It consists of cheese, fruit, chocolate and dessert wines. There are some old traditions about passing these around the table, but do not worry too much if you go in the wrong direction – the main thing is to make sure all the diners get access to all the things on the table.

The wines in theory are always circulated to the left, and those dining should try to ensure they keep moving around the table. In the event that you are presiding, you should offer each wine to the person sitting to your right before passing the wines left. There is no grace at
dessert. After about 40 minutes or so, whoever is presiding will ‘rise’ and go to make the coffee, which is a signal that everyone can move through to the other room to have coffee, tea or something from the drinks cabinet, and that the formal part of the evening is over. Feel free to remain sitting at dessert for as long as you wish or to move through to the other part of the SCR if you or your guests need to leave.

Guest nights are sociable, popular evenings, and offer a chance to meet a wide range of people from inside and outside the college. SCR members are advised to sign up for them early since numbers are limited. Sometimes the meals are themed (e.g. Halloween, Burns Night – and you can see this and the menus week by week on Bookwhen).

Members may bring up to two guests – if you want to bring more, please check with me first. If there are more than 20 SCR people in total at the dinner, some may be seated at the lower tables. Please let a member of the Hall staff know if you or your guests need disability access so that we can help seat you near the lift.

It is fine to come only to dinner and not stay for dessert (please make this clear when you sign up). It is also possible (if it suits your plans better) to come only for dessert – in which case please let me know.

4. Charges

Depending on your contract, certain meals may be subject to charge. For those with ‘Full’ dining rights, meals themselves are free, but additional charges are made for guests brought into college and for any alcohol consumed. If you bring guests in to breakfast, lunch or informal hall, please sign in your guests on the sheet provided in the Hall itself. You can expect to pay approximately £5 for such meals. The charges for guest nights are specified on the online booking form.

The above assumes your dining rights cover the meal concerned. Please note that under these arrangements there is no discount for not attending dessert. If you sign up as ‘teetotal’, however, you will not be charged for wine. You should indicate on the sign-up sheet whether your guest is a private guest, and paid for from your battels, or from your entertainment allowance, or a guest specifically invited for the benefit of the college. If you would like further clarity on these categories, please ask stephanie.hanks@spc.ox.ac.uk.

5. Other Social Events

From time to time the SCR Committee will organise other events. We always welcome suggestions, and if you have any ideas for alternative social events, we would be very interested to hear them. There are some things aimed at partners and families, and we hope that you will bring them into college as well.
6. SCR Meetings

There is usually one SCR meeting a term, usually held at lunchtime, though if members request an additional meeting they can be held more frequently. These are an opportunity for the committee to report to and be held accountable by the SCR’s membership.

7. Who to ask for help

Paul Irons and the other staff in the lodge will often be your first port of call. They know (almost) everything that happens in college, and can help with many practical matters. The lodge number is (2)78900.

For arrangements regarding meals, you should book in for formal meals with the online system. If you have any queries, please contact catering@spc.ox.ac.uk. Do please let the catering staff know if you have any food allergies or other dietary requirements.

Anne Millard, the Fellows’ Secretary, and Catherine Whalley, the College Registrar, can be emailed at fellows.secretary@spc.ox.ac.uk and catherine.whalley@spc.ox.ac.uk. Between them they will be able to answer most of your administrative queries.

And, of course, I am very happy to answer any questions you may have. My email address is lionel.mason@spc.ox.ac.uk. If you have suggestions for improvements or innovations in the SCR, it would be very helpful if you could write them in the suggestions book, which is located in the coffee room.

I look forward to meeting you very much, and hope that you will enjoy your time at St Peter’s. Although it can be slightly bewildering at the start, I have found it a friendly and inclusive place, full of interesting people and ideas.

With best wishes,

Prof Lionel Mason

SCR President

Members of the SCR Committee: Dr Tim Mawson, Dr Peter Kail