

# Welcome to University College

## **FORMALS HANDBOOK**



Your Guide to Formal Dinners at  
University College



**University College**  
Durham University

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## What is a Castle Formal?

Formal dinners, or 'formals' are a central Castle tradition and an integral part of life in college. They offer a unique opportunity for members of the Castle community (JCR, MCR, SCR and College staff and guests of the College) to come together weekly and enjoy a served three-course meal in the Great Hall of Durham Castle. Formals require a huge amount of skilled work and effort by the kitchen team, servery staff, security staff, common room leaders and College Office staff.

**Formals offer a sense of belonging in our University College community.** They are a shared experience where undergraduates, postgraduates, SCR members, mentors, staff, and guests join together to share a meal in heritage setting. We all wear gowns as a visual sign that we all belong. Formals are an opportunity to socialise in a formal environment. The dress code is smart, with a gown. Through occasional themed formals, we promote important causes, highlight specific campaigns and learn about each other's cultures, practices and beliefs in an open and meaningful way.

As such, formals demand a level of respect. They are a privilege and not a right to be taken advantage of. For this reason, there are certain protocols that we expect all attendees to follow when attending formals. Please take your time to read through these expectations below. If you have any questions, or need any clarification on any of the formal protocols, please see a list of contacts at the bottom.

## Formals Calendar

Formals are held weekly on a Thursday evening during term-time. On occasion we may have two formals per week when there are special occasions. Formals open with a few words of welcome from the Presiding Officer, usually the Principal or another senior member of staff. A few times per term we have themed formals to highlight specific festivals, campaigns or causes within the College community. These are decided by College Office, in conjunction with the three common rooms. If you have a suggestion for a themed Formal, please contact College Office via [univcoll.office@durham.ac.uk](mailto:univcoll.office@durham.ac.uk), as we'd love to consider new ideas for the future.

## Booking

Common rooms are responsible for organising and administering the booking system for their members, and guests if they wish. See contacts at the end of this guide.

## Who's in the Hall

Total capacity of the hall: 210 seats

SCR: up to 40 (up to 30 for SCR, up to 10 for College Office and Guests) If only 20 on high table then extra seats for JCR/MCR below.

MCR: from 55 seats (32% remaining seats)

JCR: from 115 seats (68% remaining seats)

The current ratio in the student body is 68:32, undergraduate: postgraduate. We can review this split in future years in line with student numbers.

Formal will run between 7pm and 8:15pm approximately.

## What happens when: JCR

**Arrival:** Please ensure you are queuing to enter the Great Hall in Screens Passage, or the Courtyard steps if the queue has become too long for Screens, by **6:45pm at the latest**.

**Drinks** (alcoholic and soft drinks) can be bought before the formal from the Undercroft Bar. The bar closes at 6:45pm.

**Entering the Hall:** When the doors are opened by the Undercroft staff, you may enter the Hall. Formal starts promptly at 7pm. Any attendees that arrive after this time will be refused entry. Refunds are not available for late attendees that are refused entry. Please sit promptly at one of the JCR tables (these will be labelled) in an available seat.

**Dietary requirements:** If you have any dietary requirements, please indicate this at the time of booking.

**High table:** Please stand and remain silent when the high table enters, and sit down when the Presiding Officer asks you to. Please stand for a short speech from the Presiding Officer and College Grace. Please remain silent until you sit down.

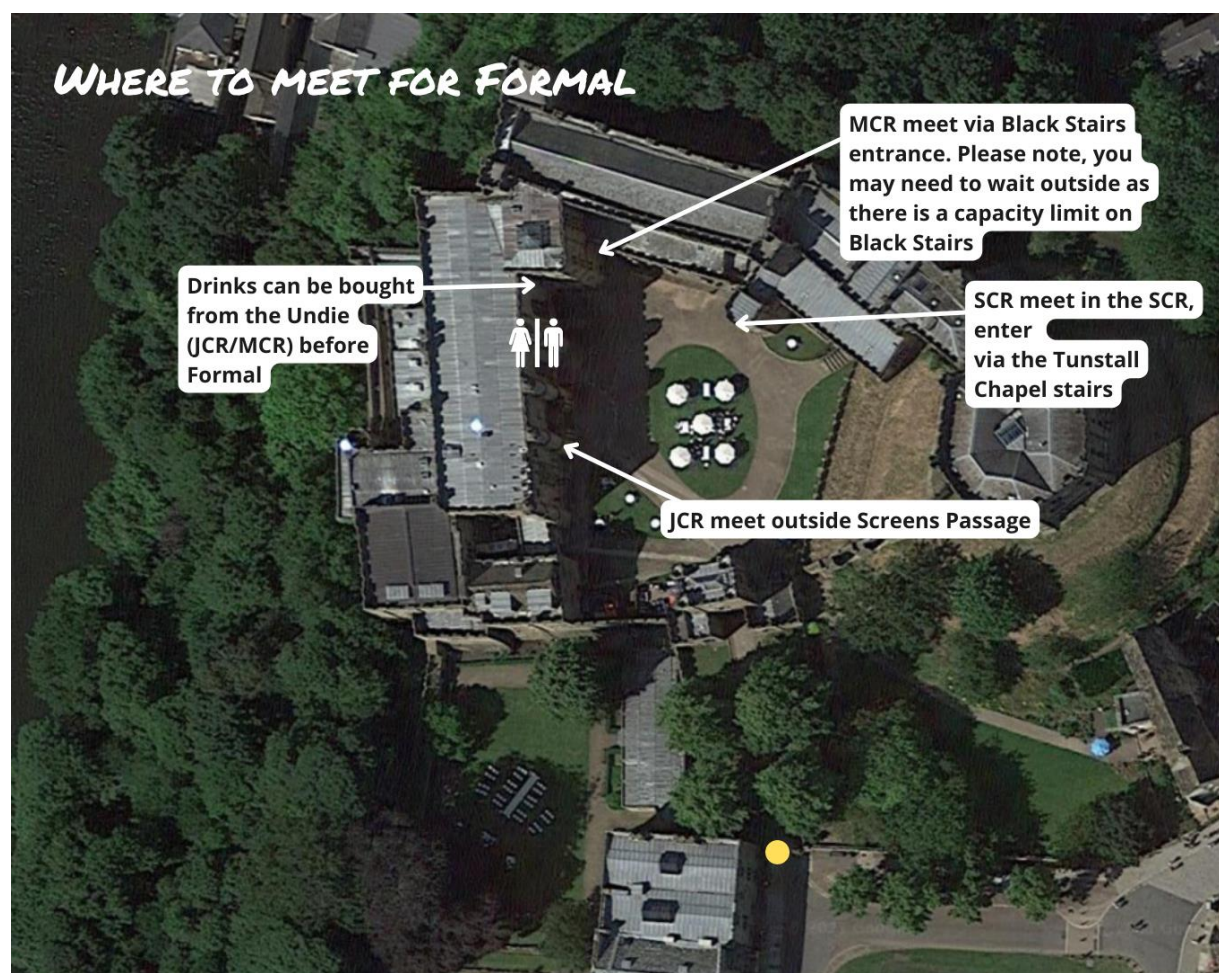
**During Dinner:** please remain seated for the duration of the formal, until the Senior Student/MCR President has bowed out to the Principal and has opened the doors at the back of the Hall. Once this has happened, you may rise from your seat and leave the hall if you wish. You are encouraged to remain seated in the Hall throughout formal, unless you need to leave for your health, wellbeing or comfort. **We recommend that you use the toilet before entering formal.**

**If you do need to leave:** please politely call a member of the Undercroft staff over to you by raising your hand. They will be able to escort you out during a suitable time (e.g., when serving staff are not serving). Undercroft staff will also wait for a suitable time to escort you back into the formal to



your seat. Please be aware that if you do leave the Hall, you may be waiting for some time to be let back in.

Numbers leaving the Hall at any one time may be monitored. Exceptions for this may include medical reasons or mental health emergencies. If you are in this position, you may leave with another guest. You do not need to disclose any reason for leaving to security staff if you do not wish to. If you wish to return to the Hall, you will need to wait until the server staff are ready to let you back in.



## What happens when: MCR

**Arrival:** Please ensure you are queuing to enter the Great Hall via the **Black Stairs entrance**, by 6:45pm at the latest. You may need to wait in the Courtyard as there is a capacity limit on the Black Stairs.

**Drinks:** Drinks (alcoholic and soft drinks) can be bought before the formal from the Undercroft Bar (until 6:45pm). The MCR will be closed and locked at 6:50pm.

**Entering the Hall:** When the doors are opened by the Undercroft staff, you may enter the Hall. Formal starts promptly at 7pm. Any attendees that arrive after this time will be refused entry. Refunds are not available for late attendees that are refused entry. Please sit promptly at one of the MCR tables (these will be labelled) in an available seat. These are usually towards the front of the Hall, next to High Table.

**Dietary requirements:** If you have any dietary requirements, please indicate this at the time of booking.

**High table:** Please stand and remain silent when the high table enters, and sit down when the Presiding Officer asks you to. Please stand for a short speech from the Presiding Officer and College Grace. Please remain silent until you sit down.

**During Dinner:** please remain seated for the duration of the formal, until the Senior Student/MCR President has bowed out to the Principal and has opened the doors at the back of the Hall. Once this has happened, you may rise from your seat and leave the hall if you wish.

You are encouraged to remain seated in the Hall throughout formal, unless you need to leave for your health, wellbeing or comfort. **We recommend that you use the toilet before entering formal.**

**If you do need to leave:** please politely call a member of the Undercroft staff over to you by raising your hand. They will be able to escort you out during a suitable time (e.g., when serving staff are not serving). Undercroft staff will also wait for a suitable time to escort you back into the formal to your seat. Please be aware that if you do leave the Hall, you may be waiting for some time to be let back in.

Numbers leaving the Hall at any one time may be monitored. Exceptions for this may include medical reasons or mental health emergencies. If you are in this position, you may leave with another guest. You do not need to disclose any reason for leaving to security staff if you do not wish to.

## What happens when: SCR

**Arrival:** Please meet in the Senior Common Room from 6:30pm onwards.

**Drinks:** Drinks (alcoholic and soft drinks) can be pre-ordered with your formal ticket.

**Entering the Hall:** High table will be invited to process from the SCR via the Black Stairs once the JCR and MCR are seated. A table plan will be available and name places at each seat.

**Dietary requirements:** please include these on the booking form for your ticket.

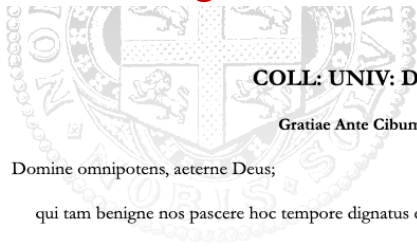
**High table:** when High Table processes into the Hall, the rest of the Hall will stand. The Presiding Officer will invite you to be seated during a short speech and to stand for College Grace.

**During Dinner:** You are encouraged to remain seated in the Hall throughout formal, unless you need to leave for your health, wellbeing or comfort.

**Bowing out:** the JCR Senior Student and/or MCR President (or their representative) will bow out to the Presiding Officer. Before High Table leaves the Hall, parting grace will be said.

**After dinner:** members of High Table and their guests are welcome to socialise in the Senior Common Room.

## College Grace



COLL: UNIV: DUNELM:

Gratiae Ante Cibum Agendae

Domine omnipotens, aeternae Deus;  
qui tam benigne nos pascere hoc tempore dignatus es;  
largire nobis,  
ut tibi semper  
pro tua in nos bonitate  
ex animo gratias agamus;  
vitam honeste et pie transigamus;  
et studia ea sectemur  
quae gloriam tuam illustrare  
et ecclesiae tuae adiumenta esse possint;  
per Christum dominum nostrum.

AMEN.

With thanks to Professor Peter Rhodes at Castle, who says that 'the source of this grace is unknown, but that it is not the same as any of the Oxbridge graces. The spacing of the Latin gives an indication of where pauses should be. It should be read with either ecclesiastical pronunciation, or academic, but not a mixture of both; and the acoustics of the hall are difficult, but readers should try to project their voices so as to be loud but not belligerent!'

### COLLEGE GRACE

University College Durham

Grace Before Dinner: Translation

Almighty Lord, eternal God; who hast so graciously deigned to feed us at this time; grant to us, that we may ever give Thee heartfelt thanks for Thy goodness to us; that we may pass our lives honourably and religiously; and that we may follow such pursuits as can shed light on Thy glory and afford assistance to Thy church; through Christ our Lord.

AMEN.

College Grace Readers are organised by the Chaplain, Rev'd Dr Stephanie Burette, and rotate between members of the JCR and MCR. Full training on the correct pronunciation is given. Please get in touch with Stephanie (contact details below) if you would like to join the team of College Grace Readers.

## What to wear

# What to wear to a Castle Formal

We want you to be comfortable and relaxed at the event whilst also respecting the dinner as a formal occasion. A few options to help you with the dress code

## NORMAL FORMAL



Shoes rather than trainers

Lounge suit, shirt and tie



On occasion, it might be appropriate to wear a bow tie instead of a tie, for example at College Feast.

Black tie (bow tie)



A normal suit with a bow tie is also fine!

PLUS YOUR GOWN



1. All attendees wear their academic or matriculation gown during the Formal from when they enter the hall to when they leave. Wearing a gown at formal is a long-standing tradition at Castle. The gown symbolises our unity, equality and sense of belonging to our unique community.
  - a. For guests who may not own a Durham academic gown, any black undress academic-style gown will suffice (e.g., no academic hoods or graduation dress gowns)
  - b. If you require information on how to purchase or borrow a gown, see the contact table below
2. Gowns should be covering the shoulders at all times.
3. The dress code for formals is smart attire. The dress code is defined without reference to considerations of gender identity or expression.
  - a. In general, items of clothing that are acceptable include: trouser suits and necktie, cocktail dresses, jumpsuits, appropriate style playsuits, heeled shoes.
  - b. Items of clothing that are not acceptable include: denim, bow ties (apart from at specific events such as College Feast), knitwear, t-shirts, trainers, hats, sunglasses, scarves, shorts, ball gowns.
  - c. Appropriate footwear should be worn within this dress code.

If, for whatever reason, you or your guests need some flexibility in the dress code (for example, a twisted ankle or a cast), then please let the relevant contact know below.

## A note on alcohol

We expect attendees at Formal to be respectful as part of our living, learning community. Individuals take responsibility for their own actions and behaviour.

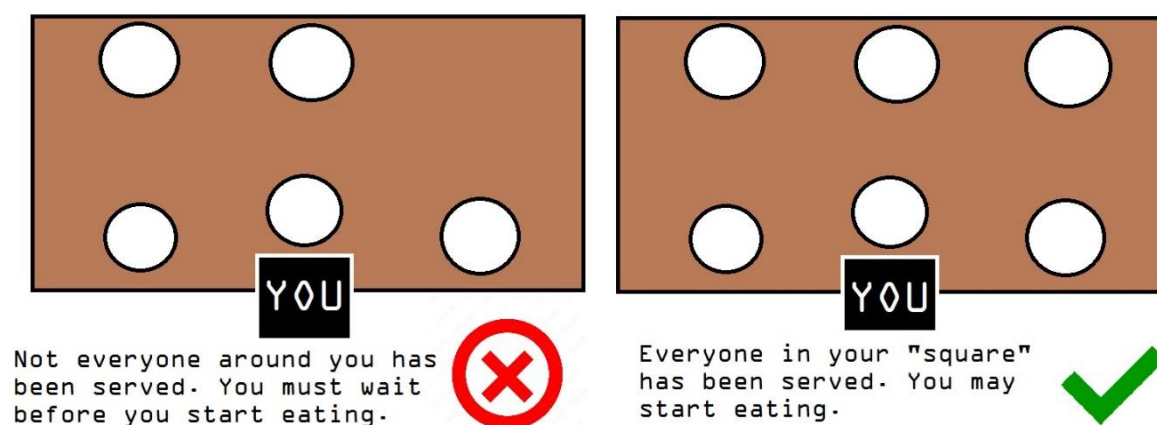
1. It is expected that no attendees will arrive at formal intoxicated. Any drunken attendees will not be permitted to enter the Hall. Drunken attendees may also be escorted out of the Hall during formal. This will be at the discretion of security staff.
2. The maximum amount of alcohol permitted in the formal is either: a half bottle of wine or prosecco, equivalent units of beer (two pints) or a pre-mixed gin and tonic. All drinks must be purchased on-site from the Undercroft Bar, prior to the formal starting. You cannot bring in any drinks from outside of the Castle.
3. During the formal, it is expected that all drinks must be drunk out of a glass provided to you at your table. Please refrain from drinking out of the bottle.
4. The Undercroft Bar will be open from 6:15pm onwards for casual drinks and mingling prior to formal. A reduced selection of beverages will be available to purchase during this time. The bar will close at 6:45pm sharp. Please arrive as early as possible and be aware there is normally a queue.
5. Non-alcoholic options will also be available to purchase and take into formal.

6. Drinking games are not permitted during formals, in line with the University policy on alcohol.

We expect that attendees will make sensible, healthy consumption choices at formal. Remember that binge drinking limits in the UK are between 6-8 units in a single session. For reference, a half bottle of wine contains approximately 4-5 units of alcohol. Please know your limits and act responsibly.

## Code of Conduct: Etiquette and Respect

1. We expect that no phones or cameras are used during the procession of formal. Photographs may be taken after the doors have been opened by the Senior Student.
  - a. In this light, please talk to and include those sat next to you, especially those dining alone.
2. It is expected that attendees try to follow formal dining etiquette:
  - a. Cutlery should be used working from the outside in, with separate utensils for each course. The spoon placed above the plate is for dessert.
  - b. Your napkin is placed on your lap.
  - c. Your side plate with bread is placed on your left.
  - d. It is polite to wait until the people in the immediate square surrounding you have been served before beginning to eat. Please see the figure below.



3. Complete respect, politeness and good manners must be shown to catering, servery, security staff and other attendees at all times during the formal. Any unnecessary disruption to any other attendees or staff due to loud noises, singing, clapping loudly, cheering, throwing food or banging cutlery is not permitted.
4. Attendees are responsible for the behaviour of any external guests they may bring. They are also responsible that guests are aware of, and abide by, this Code of Conduct.



We encourage you to act as an active bystander during formal, encouraging others to stick by this Code of Conduct at all times, to ensure that formals are as inclusive and respectful as they should be to all guests and staff involved in the event. If you do not respect this Code of Conduct and do not follow the expectations of you outlined above, then you will not be welcome to attend formals.

**JCR and MCR execs are responsible for ensuring expectations of behaviour are met. Any serious breaches of these expectations will be referred to College staff under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.**

We hope that you enjoy formals at Castle and enjoy being a part of our community.

Floreat Castellum!

## Contacts

Common room	Role	Name	Email	Can help with
JCR (UGs)	JCR Services Manager	Ella Banks	<a href="mailto:Castle.servicesmanager@durham.ac.uk">Castle.servicesmanager@durham.ac.uk</a>	Booking system; any queries
	Senior Student	Ananya Nair	<a href="mailto:Castle.seniorstudent@durham.ac.uk">Castle.seniorstudent@durham.ac.uk</a>	Borrowing a gown
MCR (PGs)	President	Sian Bell	<a href="mailto:President.castlemcr@durham.ac.uk">President.castlemcr@durham.ac.uk</a>	Any MCR queries
	Vice-President	Leonie Stuessi	<a href="mailto:Castle.mcr@durham.ac.uk">Castle.mcr@durham.ac.uk</a>	Booking system; borrowing a gown
SCR (University staff and members of local community)	Secretary	Francis Pritchard	<a href="mailto:Francis.pritchard@durham.ac.uk">Francis.pritchard@durham.ac.uk</a>	Any SCR queries
College staff	Food & Beverage Services Manager	Jamie Short	<a href="mailto:jamie.short@durham.ac.uk">jamie.short@durham.ac.uk</a>	Any catering or event queries
	College Administration Co-Ordinator	Tracy Donnelly & Nicola Dixon	<a href="mailto:Univcoll.office@durham.ac.uk">Univcoll.office@durham.ac.uk</a>	High Table bookings
	Chaplain and Solway Fellow	Rev'd Dr Stephanie Burette	<a href="mailto:Stephanie.burette@durham.ac.uk">Stephanie.burette@durham.ac.uk</a>	Reading grace

## The working group

In 2021, a working group of undergraduates, postgraduates, staff and SCR members got together to explore how Formals can be re-established post-pandemic in a way that is meaningful and inclusive for the whole community, leading to this handbook. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this group and the lively discussion!

### JCR

Lauren Shields, fourth year, JCR services manager (2020-21)

Izzy Harris, second year

Charlie McKeever, second year, incoming JCR Treasurer (2021-22)

Sian Bell, second year, incoming Senior Student (2021-22)

Bob Howat, third year, incoming Services Manager (2021-22)

### MCR

Vicky Fawcett, MCR President (2020-21)

Sophie Draper, second year PhD

Ben Jones, PhD student

### SCR

Professor Peter Rhodes +

Professor Martin Ward

### Staff

Jamie Short, Food & Beverage Manager (co-chair)

Dr Ellen Crabtree, Vice-Principal (co-chair)

Rev'd Dr Stephanie Burette, Chaplain & Solway Fellow

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*Last updated July 2023*