

June 10th, 2020

Dear Students

Thank you for your letter expressing your concerns for the welfare of Black students at the University at this time. We are writing to you as a group of individuals who care deeply about our University: we appreciate you writing to us, not least because we share your concerns about the traumatic effect of the brutality which killed George Floyd and which is a manifestation of institutionalised racism. The collective failures to address attitudes and behaviours which amount to discrimination are still prevalent in many institutions, including higher education.

We're determined to support our Black students in every way we can. You asked in your letter about a number of specific welfare issues, and we will address those first:

- **Mitigating circumstances**

We encourage any students with mitigating circumstances to apply to have those taken into account.

Any student taking University assessments who feels their performance has been affected should submit a self-assessment mitigating circumstances form after their final examination or assessment. This is available to all students on the Proctors' website <https://www.proctors.ox.ac.uk/forms>. Students are strongly encouraged in advance of submitting their form to contact their college academic office who can provide lots of advice and guidance on completing the form. Undergraduate students might also wish to make contact with their college tutors/senior tutor/welfare staff, and likewise any graduate student to contact their college tutor for graduates/welfare staff. The heads of house signatories of this letter will alert all college academic and welfare staff to the potential need here, and will urge those colleagues to reach out to any students who may be experiencing difficulty at this time.

- **Black counsellors**

The University has committed to continue increasing the diversity of its counselling team by engaging Black counsellors as soon as possible. In the short term it is seeking to extend such provision by facilitating access to a network of Black counsellors outside the University. We would encourage students to make full use of the University Counselling Service, where there is a strong commitment to making Black students welcome and to working with them sensitively and effectively. We hope, too, that Black students will feel able to reach out to their welfare supporters or staff in college. They may wish to get in touch with a network of peer supporters of colour, who can work across colleges. Details are here:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling/peersupport?wssl=1> and students can email here: peersofcolour@admin.ox.ac.uk

- **Reduction of workload**

The heads of house signatories of this letter will alert college tutors, senior tutors, tutors for graduates and welfare staff to the potential need here, and will urge those colleagues to reach out to any Black students who may be experiencing difficulty at this time.

This is a matter for individual discussions between students and their tutors. We urge any undergraduate who is feeling the strain to contact their tutors/senior tutor/welfare supporter as soon as possible, and likewise any graduate student to contact their supervisor/college tutor for graduates/college welfare team

- **Urge staff and students to sign petitions**

We commend the response of so many Oxford University students and staff, and we note that some helpful advice can be found at the Oxford Student Union resource page here:

<https://www.oxfordsu.org/news/article/6013/Statement-on-anti-Black-racism-and-information-on-resources-available/>

In addition, we urge all who protest to know their rights, which they can find here:

<https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/your-rights/>

- **Donate to organisations**

Because colleges and the University are themselves charities, that makes their giving to other charities complex and often impossible under charity law. However, we completely understand the importance of encouraging and urging staff and students, and anyone connected with Oxford University, past and present, to express their support for any cause they feel will make a difference.

Alongside addressing these specific issues you raised, we remain open to further conversation about what our Black students need at this time. We are aware that it is both easy and problematic to assume that we know what others need without asking them. We would welcome a conversation to discuss what more Oxford University and its colleges can do to support our students, and to this end will continue our dialogue with the [Oxford African and Caribbean Society \(ACS\)](#). We wholly identify with the vision of Black Lives Matter of “imagining and creating a world free of anti-blackness, where every black person has the social, economic and political power to thrive.”

While much is being done by many committed people, we acknowledge that we are rightly reproached for our collective failure to address the issue of systemic racism properly, and that we have work to do. We are planning a number of initiatives, as part of that work, including the following:

- A University fundraising initiative for scholarships for Black students
- A review of all the Equality and Diversity Unit [EDU] training materials that are used across the University and colleges to ensure they are fit for purpose. We will involve students in the process.
- Setting up an access track within UNIQ to meet the specific needs of BAME students wishing to apply to Oxford.
- Many different initiatives across individual colleges and departments.
- Continuing to work with the pressing diversity challenges in relation to other groups.

The heads of all colleges committed ourselves to doing the work that we know is needed, in a letter to *The Guardian*, published last week.

We reiterate here what we said in that letter: “We recognise and regret that, for black members of our community, the unfolding crisis together with the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on their communities has caused them particular anxiety, anger and pain. We stand with them during these difficult moments with hope that, through the global mobilisation of many against these injustices, through education, discussion, and peaceful protest, we may work together towards a world free of systemic racism and discrimination.”

We also state that we have zero tolerance for racist comments or behaviours by staff or students of any kind.

Finally, please appreciate that this is not a one-off response. We are aware of other concerns that have been voiced elsewhere and will do our best – given the pressures of final examinations and the Covid-19 emergency – to engage with the issues that have been raised.

We hope that you will join with us in continuing to do the work that is needed to create a genuinely diverse and inclusive community, in which all feel respected and secure.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Richardson, Vice Chancellor

And the Heads of House of the following colleges:

Dame Helen Ghosh, Balliol

Revd Dr David Goodill OP, Blackfriars

John Bowers QC, Brasenose College

The Very Revd Professor Martyn Percy, Christ Church

Professor Ian Watson, Christ Church

Dr Helen Moore, Corpus Christi College

Professor Sir Rick Trainor, Exeter College

Professor Jane Shaw, Harris Manchester College

Will Hutton, Hertford College

Professor Sir Nigel Shadbolt, Jesus College

Sir Jonathan Phillips, Keble College

Alan Rusbridger, Lady Margaret Hall

Professor Henry Woudhuysen, Lincoln College

Professor Sir David Clary, Magdalen College

Helen Mansfield, QC, Mansfield College

Professor Irene Tracey, Merton College

Miles Young, New College

Neil Mendoza, Oriel College

Dame Lynne Brindley, Pembroke College

Dr Claire Craig, The Queen's College

Revd Dr Robert Ellis, Regent's Park College

Helen King, St Anne's College

Professor Richard Cooper, St Benet's Hall

Professor Kersti Borjars, St Catherine's College

Professor Kathy Willis, St Edmund Hall

Professor Sir Gordon Duff, St Hilda's College

Dame Elish Angiolini, St Hugh's College

Professor Maggie Snowling, St John's College

Professor Judith Buchanan, St Peter's College

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, Somerville College

Dame Hilary Boulding, Trinity College

Sir Ivor Crewe, University College

Lord Macdonald of River Glaven, Wadham College

Professor Kate Tunstall, Worcester College

Rev Dr Michael Lloyd, Wycliffe Hall