

The Vice-Chancellor  
**Professor Louise Richardson, FRSE**

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The Oxford African Caribbean Society  
by email

15 June 2020

Dear students of the Oxford African and Caribbean Society,

– Thank you for your open letter and, once again, thank you for your tireless work on promoting the University to Black students. I am sorry it has taken a little time to get back to you as we take stock of what needs to be done and where we can improve our provision. The University is committed to addressing anti-Blackness and systemic racism, including when they are found within our community. It is true that the University has, as Britain does, a history closely entwined with colonialism and imperialism. We cannot deny that nor minimise it. What we can do, and are doing, and will continue to do, is put our resources to good use in research and teaching to improve the world around us.

You will have seen, I expect, the joint letter I wrote with the Heads of undergraduate colleges in response to a different open letter on the same theme last week. I hope this will address some of your concerns about how the University is supporting its Black students and working against systemic racism. You raised some more specific points which I'll address here.

As the Heads of House and I said, we are committed to offering a diverse pool of counsellors within the Counselling Service; in the short term we are looking to address this by working with industry bodies to bring in external expertise so students can have access to the support they need. It is a national concern that the counselling profession is relatively white and we have recently taken on a Black trainee counsellor who is working with some students now. We are also committed to enhanced training to raise awareness among the existing pool of counsellors on issues related to race and racism.

The Heads of Houses and Senior Tutors have made clear to all tutors that they should be sensitive to any requests for reduced workload at this highly sensitive time. As well as the additional arrangements put in place due to covid-19, We are all engaged in an enormous experiment at present with alternative modes of assessment for Finals, and with the primary factor in awarding A-level grades changing from terminal examination to school-based internal assessment. We do not know what the equalities impact of these changes will be, nor whether we will have the option to return to 'normal' in 2021. In many cases, I expect we will not wish to go back to how things were done before. The impact on access, and on attainment gaps, will be at the forefront of our decision-making process and we are looking forward to engaging with the evidence.

The University's [Race Equality Charter action plan](#) outlines our plans to increase the proportion of academics and staff in leadership and decision-making positions who identify as BME. The

University continues to work to increase the ethnic diversity of staff through initiatives to, for example, assist in removing bias from recruitment processes – new measures on this were brought forward to Personnel Committee last week. To measure progress it is developing ambitious targets for the representation of BME staff in all staff groups and in University leadership and governance. The University takes part in international collaborations to promote opportunities for visiting academics, including the [TORCH Global South Visiting Professorships](#) and Fellowships and the [Africa Oxford Initiative \(AfOx\) Visiting Fellows Programme](#).

You asked some specific questions about progress against key objectives in the Race Equality Charter action plan and I am pleased to be able to reassure you. Since the plan was issued in 2018, over 2900 staff have used the online Implicit Bias training, and large numbers have also attended in-person training organised at departmental and college level. I will write to you in more detail on that once I have the latest figures, which we are having trouble collecting due to the number of staff currently furloughed. We are about to begin a university wide consultation on revising and refreshing these actions in preparation for our next institutional REC application (Feb 2022). As part of this we are discussing a proposal to make training mandatory for everyone in their probationary period. Personnel Committee agreed last week to make IB training mandatory for everyone on recruitment panels.

Different colleges use different titles and divisions of responsibilities, but at least 27/39 Colleges have a specific post of Tutor for Equality & Diversity or Tutor for Race as recommended in the Race Equality Charter Action Plan, exceeding the target of 60% by 2021. (There may be other colleges which have created such a post but not informed the University). I will write to the Conference of Colleges Equality and Diversity Forum to encourage the remaining colleges to do so.

The commitment to provide a physical meeting space for liberation groups we consider to have been met by the move of Oxford SU to 4 Worcester St, where a number of meeting spaces are available (unlike in the old OUSU building). I feel that it is important the booking system and terms and conditions for such a space should be under student control. I am aware that there is a general lack of bookable meeting space in the University and we are taking steps to make departmental spaces more widely accessible as part of our approach to maximising the effective use of our spaces in the ‘new normal’ environment.

The University commits to undertaking a thorough review of its approach to equality and diversity training, including reconsideration of what elements of training should be mandatory. BAME colleagues, both academic and professional staff, as well as students, will be involved in this process. As a first step we have introduced an online race awareness training module (<https://edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/training#collapse1182896>) which can reach a wider audience during what is likely to be an extended period of remote working.

I hope that Oxford ACS will continue to join with us in carrying forward the work that is needed to create a genuinely diverse and inclusive community, in which all feel respected and secure.

You have always been #morethanasociety and your work is deeply valued across the collegiate university. My colleagues and I would be very happy to speak to you further about our collective response, though I regret that this would have to be on MS Teams for the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Richardson, Vice Chancellor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Louise Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Louise" on the left and "Richardson" on the right, connected by a flourish.