

The Vice-Chancellor
Professor Louise Richardson, FRSE

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Ms Anisha Farouk
President, Oxford SU
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Dear Anisha,

– Thank you for your open letter and for the constructive attitude OSU have taken in your recent meetings with university colleagues on this important and emotive issue.

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 earlier this week (attached) and 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. We have a number of BAME counsellors and we have recently taken on a Black trainee counsellor who is working with some students now but we would like to have a more diverse pool. 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. We are also committed to enhanced training to raise awareness among the existing pool of counsellors on issues related to race and racism.

I am happy to confirm that the University's commitments under the Access and Participation Plan are unchanged and there is absolutely no intention of changing them 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.

At graduate level we are aware that progress is slower than at undergraduate and this is the

first step in the 'pipeline' issues which persist all the way up to senior professors. We are committed to exploring how increasing the representation of Black students at post-graduate level can be taken forward especially via UNIQ+ which is entering its second year, unfortunately as a remote programme due to the pandemic. We hope that if UNIQ+ Digital is a success we can roll it out to many students in future years who are unable to attend in person. 5% of the first UNIQ+ cohort identified as Black, which is higher than the general population. We also introduced an application fee waiver for the world's 30 lowest-income countries as well as (with effect from this summer) for the ~14% of UK applicants who received the maximum level of financial support as undergraduates. Early indications are that these waivers have increased applications but not successful applications, and we are therefore introducing extensive online support for such applicants. As you know, Oxford SU are closely involved in developing this programme.

The topic of 'decolonising' or 'diversifying' the curriculum is being taken forward primarily by academic experts at departmental level where an enormous amount of work has taken place in recent years including extensive changes to course structures in departments including History, English and Politics & International Relations. The Postcolonial Writers Make Worlds website (www.writersmakeworlds.com) is a central resource to support the teaching of black and minority ethnic writers is a core part of the English Faculty curriculum, and the Faculty aspires to expand that part of its teaching. History has undergone a systematic review of all its teaching offerings in collaboration with Common Ground, and is committed to continuing to implement the findings of that review. We teach and study more non-European languages than any other university in the UK, and more than nearly all the universities in the world. We have prominent area studies departments, a vast number of staff engaged in global histories, languages and cultures around the world, and our teaching reflects this global perspective.

The MPLS Division has been awarded a grant from the Diversity Fund to take forward a project to develop teaching resources to support the diversification of STEM curricula, an area that is frequently overlooked. Many departments in Social Sciences have begun work on making their curriculum more inclusive and adding diverse voices to it. This includes steps such as: integrating race and gender questions into topics; embedding teaching on colonialism and empire into courses; changing reading lists to ensure substantial representation of a diverse range of voices; ensuring better coverage of issues concerning the global South in syllabuses. Many syllabuses are currently under review as a result of these changes but this is only a starting point towards the truly inclusive curriculum. Social Sciences Division is also developing a short taught graduate course on "Decolonising Research Methods" to be piloted as an online course in HT2021. This is a project run jointly by academics in the Department of Education and the School of Geography and the Environment along with a colleague at the University of South Africa. Similar initiatives are underway across the collegiate university.

The University's [Race Equality Charter action plan](#) outlines our plans to increase the proportion of academics and of 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, for example, to assist in removing bias from recruitment processes – new measures on this are being brought forward to Personnel Committee this 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.

The University commits to undertaking a thorough review of its approach to equality and diversity training, including reconsideration of whether 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.

In the present economic crisis where the University is having to consider many cost cutting exercises we have protected the OLW and it will go forward on Aug 1 as planned. The University is also initiating discussions with suppliers regarding a move to Oxford Living Wage where practicable.

I hope that Oxford SU 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 can do their best work while feeling respected and secure.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louise Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "L".