

Equality Policy



Approved by Council on 16 March 2020

The University of Oxford is committed to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its staff and students are respected. We recognise that the broad range of experiences that a diverse staff and student body brings strengthens our research and enhances our teaching, and that in order for Oxford to remain a world-leading institution we must continue to provide a diverse, inclusive, fair and open environment that allows everyone to grow and flourish.

The University embraces diversity amongst its members and seeks to achieve equity in the experience, progression and achievement of all students and staff through the implementation of transparent policies, practices and procedures and the provision of effective support. It also seeks to ensure that its public engagement work and services benefit diverse audiences and communities.

The University recognises that equality and inclusion should be embedded in all its activities and seeks to promote awareness of equality and foster good practice. The University is committed to a programme of action to support its equality policy, to monitoring its effectiveness, and to publishing information on progress towards its equality aims.

The University seeks to ensure that no member of its community is unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status¹, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, or sexual orientation (hereafter referred to as the 'protected characteristics').

In exercising its policies, practices, procedures and other functions, the University will have due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and to the protected characteristics, as well as other relevant circumstances including parental or caring responsibilities, contract type, and working hours.

The University will seek to make a positive contribution to the advancement of equality through all its activities. In particular, the University will:

- Encourage applications for study and employment from the widest pool of potential candidates, especially where representation is disproportionately low, and take lawful positive action, for example with targeted scholarships, to improve diversity where appropriate.
- Take appropriate steps to meet the particular needs of individuals from protected groups where these are different from the needs of others, and work to eliminate any barriers to their success.
- **In respect of students**, seek to attract and admit students of outstanding potential whatever their background, and work to ensure that teaching and assessment provide an equal opportunity for all students to achieve and demonstrate their full academic potential.

¹ Marriage and civil partnership is protected in respect of employment only.

Decisions on the admission of students will be based solely on the individual merits of each candidate and the application of selection criteria appropriate to the course of study.

- **In respect of staff**, seek to ensure that entry into employment and progression within employment are determined solely by criteria which are related to the duties of a particular post and the relevant grade; and support career development and progression with the aim of ensuring diverse representation and participation at all levels.

The University understands inclusion to mean institutional and individual efforts and actions to foster an environment and institutional culture in which each member feels, and is, valued, listened to and respected, able to be themselves and empowered to participate fully in the life of the University.

The University expects all members of the University community to treat each other with respect, courtesy and consideration and does not tolerate any form of unlawful discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation. It has a Policy on Harassment, which includes examples of unacceptable behaviour, supported by a Harassment Advisory Service².

Freedom of expression and academic freedom, as outlined in the University's Statement on Freedom of Speech³, are protected by law, and by the University's statutes and policies⁴, though these rights must be exercised within the law⁵.

Application of the Equality Policy

This policy applies to all members of the University community, including:

- All students (i.e. everyone who has a contract for study with the University);
- All members of staff holding a contract of employment, and academic visitors from other institutions;
- Honorary or associate members;
- Workers employed through the Temporary Staffing Service;
- Voluntary workers and interns;
- External members appointed to University committees;
- Visitors, including external persons or agencies using the University's premises, facilities or services;
- Contractors working at the University;
- Individuals and organisations working or acting on the University's behalf, including suppliers of goods and services;
- Applicants for study and employment, including offer holders.

² edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/harassment-advice

³ compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/freedom-of-speech

⁴ See the University's Code of Practice on Meetings and Events: compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/meetings-and-events

⁵ The University recognises that the boundaries between freedom of expression and unlawful discrimination and harassment are not easily defined. However, helpful guidance has been published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission:

- Freedom of Expression Legal Framework: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/freedom-expression-legal-framework
- Freedom of Expression: A Guide for Higher Education Providers and Students' Unions in England and Wales: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/freedom-expression-guide-higher-education-providers-and-students-unions-england

All members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this policy and to treat each other with respect at all times, and in all forms of communications, including online. All staff and students are required to follow the relevant University guidelines on the use of social media⁶.

The policy is intended to cover behaviour in a University context. This includes all conduct on University or college premises, or in the course of university activity within or outside of Oxford whether academic, sporting, social, cultural, or other.

As appropriate within the collegiate University, individuals may additionally be required to observe the equality policies adopted by individual colleges.

The University's commitment

The University will:

- seek to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities;
- have regard to its obligations under relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011;
- publicise this policy, and any related codes of practice and guidance;
- promote awareness and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion among staff and students through the provision of training, guidance and campaigns;
- foster a positive culture for working and studying which permits freedom of thought and expression within a framework of mutual respect and without violating the dignity of others in accordance with the University's Statement on Freedom of Speech⁷;
- use an evidence-based approach to inform its activities to increase equality and to measure the impact of any changes;
- develop equality objectives and an action plan, and report on progress toward attaining those objectives;
- monitor and publish data on its staff, students and applicants; and
- regularly review this policy and all associated codes of practice and guidance.

Responsibilities

Council and its major committees

Council and its major committees will identify and publish the University's strategic objectives for equality, diversity and inclusion in its Strategic Plan, and monitor progress towards achieving them.

The Advocate for Equality & Diversity

The Advocate for Equality & Diversity will provide leadership on equality and diversity and oversee the development of equality policy frameworks and their application in the University, working as appropriate with relevant colleagues and bodies, including those committees and advisory groups that have a specific remit for equality issues.

⁶ Student social media guidelines: www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/it/socialmedia and Staff social media guidelines: hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/using-social-media

⁷ compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/freedom-of-speech

The Equality and Diversity Panel

The Equality and Diversity Panel reports to the Personnel and Education Committees and advises the Equality and Diversity Unit on the development of strategy for work on equality, diversity and inclusion, covering staff and students and embracing all protected groups.

The Equality and Diversity Unit

The Equality and Diversity Unit works with University bodies, academic divisions and departments and faculties to ensure that the University's pursuit of excellence goes hand in hand with freedom from unlawful discrimination and equality of opportunity. In particular it:

- considers existing and emerging equality legislation with a view to identifying relevant issues to be translated into University policies;
- provides information and guidance to all University bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibilities;
- supports senior members of the University in showing leadership on equality, diversity and inclusion issues;
- facilitates central consultation with specific groups of staff and students;
- provides monitoring of key strategic issues and drafts publications for approval by the relevant bodies as appropriate; and
- provides advice on the employment of disabled staff⁸.

Divisions, Departments and Faculties

Heads of division, heads of department and chairs of faculty board are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of this policy and for supporting the delivery of the University's strategic objectives for equality, diversity and inclusion in that division, department or faculty.

Staff and students

All staff and students have a responsibility to:

- understand and observe this policy;
- treat others with dignity and respect; and
- respect the University's commitment to promote good relations, advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment.

All staff who manage or supervise other staff or students are responsible for ensuring that equality is embedded in the work of their team, for promoting an inclusive working, research and learning environment, and for promoting a culture of dignity and respect where issues can be raised without fear of reprisal.

⁸ Advice and support for disabled students is provided by the Disability Advisory Service:
www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability/aboutdas

Complaints

The University regards any breach of this policy by any member of the community as a serious matter to be dealt with through its agreed procedures. Any member of the University community has the right to complain of behaviour that they believe is in breach of this policy even if it is not directed at them.

Allegations of harassment are covered by the University's Policy on Harassment:

edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/university-policy-on-harassment

Complaints about other student behaviours can be made to the Proctors under Statute XI:

governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/statute-xi-university-discipline-0

The procedures for dealing with other concerns about breaches of the policy differ according to who is making the complaint and are set out below.

a) Applicants for study

Other complaints should follow the University's admissions complaints procedure:

Undergraduate admissions:

www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/decisions/complaints-and-appeals

Postgraduate admissions: www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/university-policies/complaints-and-appeals

b) Current students

Complaints about equality and diversity issues related exclusively to college matters should be taken up with the relevant college officers.

Other complaints where you think that the University has failed to follow this policy should be raised with the appropriate department. If this does not resolve your complaint it can be sent to the Proctors: academic.web.ox.ac.uk/complaints

c) Applicants for employment

Applicants for employment who have reasonable grounds to believe that they have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of their protected characteristic(s) should refer any concerns in writing to the chair of the selection panel, addressed to the contact specified in the relevant job advertisement, in the first instance.

d) Current staff

Other complaints should be handled under the relevant grievance procedure:

Grievance procedure for academic and academic-related staff:

hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/section-8-academic-related-staff-handbook

Grievance procedure for university support staff:

hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/section-8-support-staff-handbook

e) Visiting staff, honorary and associate members, volunteers and contractors should discuss their concerns with the relevant line manager or departmental or faculty contact in the first instance.

f) Members of the public should raise their complaint with the relevant head of department or faculty board chair, as listed on the University website: www.ox.ac.uk/about/departments-a-z.

Other relevant University policies

- University Policy and Procedures on Harassment: edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/university-policy-on-harassment
- Transgender Policy: edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/transgender-policy
- Staff Social Media Guidelines: hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/using-social-media
- Student Social Media Guidelines: www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/it/socialmedia
- Code of Practice on Meetings and Events: compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/meetings-and-events
- University Statement on Freedom of Speech: compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/freedom-of-speech

Review

Council, on the advice of the Personnel and Education Committees, will review this policy on a regular basis and in the event of a change to relevant legislation.