

Equality Policy



1. 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.
2. The University embraces diversity amongst its members and seeks to achieve equal opportunities 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.
3. The University 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.
4. 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 status, 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').¹
5. In exercising its policies, practices, procedures and other functions, the University will have due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to protected characteristics, as well as taking into account relevant circumstances including parental or caring responsibilities, contract type, and working hours.
6. The University will seek to make a positive contribution to the advancement of equality as set out in the Equality Act 2010. 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 connected to their protected characteristics.
 - With respect to students, seek to attract and admit students of outstanding potential from all backgrounds, and work to ensure that teaching and assessment provide an equal opportunity for all students to achieve and demonstrate their full academic potential. Decisions on the admission of students will be determined according to the individual merits of each candidate and the application of selection criteria appropriate to the course of study.
 - With respect to staff, seek to ensure that entry into, and progression within, employment is determined according to criteria which are related to the duties of a particular post and the relevant grade; and support equal opportunities in career development and progression.
7. 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.

8. Academic freedom and freedom of speech, as outlined in the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Statute XII, are protected by law and by the University's statutes and policies. This includes the ability within academic practice to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions. These rights must be exercised within the law and within reasonable restrictions set out in University policies and codes of practice.
9. 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 Harassment Policy, which includes examples of unacceptable behaviour.

Application of the Equality Policy

10. 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.
11. 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 media.²
12. As appropriate within the collegiate University, individuals may additionally be required to observe the equality policies adopted by individual colleges.

The University's commitment

13. The University will:
 - Comply with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010, in particular the Public Sector Equality Duty;
 - 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 communications;
 - 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 Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech;
 - use an evidence-based approach to inform its activities relating to equality, diversity and inclusion 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.³

Responsibilities

Council and its major committees

14. 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. These will also be set out in the EDI Strategic Plan.

The Chief Diversity Officer

15. The Chief Diversity Officer will provide leadership on equality, diversity and inclusion 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.

The Joint Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

16. The Joint Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is a committee that reports to the University's Council and to the Conference of Colleges. It acts to promote and advance equality, diversity and inclusion across the collegiate University, and drive the implementation of our EDI Strategy and related action plans.

The Equality and Diversity Panel

17. The Equality and Diversity Panel reports to the Joint Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. It provides a University forum for the sharing of views and best practice relating to EDI. It enables colleagues and students across the University - including University Administration and Services (UAS), Divisions, Departments and Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) - to contribute to the development and implementation of collegiate University initiatives on EDI.

The Equality and Diversity Unit

18. 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. This includes:

- considering existing and emerging equality legislation with a view to identifying relevant issues to be translated into University policies;
- providing information and guidance to all University bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibilities;
- supporting members of the University on equality, diversity and inclusion issues;
- facilitating central consultation with specific groups of staff and students;
- monitoring of key strategic issues and drafts publications for approval by the relevant bodies as appropriate; and
- providing advice on the employment of disabled staff.⁴

Divisions, Departments and Faculties

19. 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

20. All staff and students have a responsibility to:
- understand and observe this policy and other related policies, such as the Harassment Policy, Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and others;
 - 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.
21. 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.

Complaints

22. 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.
23. Allegations of harassment by staff members are covered by the University's Harassment Policy: edu.admin.ox.ac.uk/university-policy-on-harassment
24. Complaints about student behaviours can be made to the Proctors under Statute XI: governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/statute-xi-university-discipline-0
25. 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

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.

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.

Review

26. Council, on the advice of the Joint Committee for EDI, will review this policy on a regular basis and in the event of a change to relevant legislation.

Relevant University Policies and Guidance

- University Code of Practice on Free Speech: compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/freedom-of-speech/code-of-practice
- University Statement on Freedom of Speech: compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/freedom-of-speech

- 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: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/it/socialmedia>

Endnotes

1. Marriage and civil partnership is protected in respect of employment only.
2. 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
3. compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/prevent/freedom-of-speech
4. Advice and support for disabled students is provided by the Disability Advisory Service: www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/disability/aboutdas

Approved by Council on 16 March 2020.

Updates approved by General Purposes Committee on 6 May 2025.

Last reviewed on June 19th 2025 by the Joint Committee for EDI.