

## **Public Statement on behalf of Christ's College Cambridge concerning a complaint of anti-Semitism**

In Autumn 2016, Christ's College, Cambridge, received a complaint by two Jewish students from other colleges that they had been subjected to racial and anti-Semitic abuse by students of Christ's at a party, held outside the College, organised by the Marguerites and Hippolytans Societies, two Christ's College sporting societies. The Complaints were investigated by the College, as a result of which two Christ's students were disciplined for swearing and physical aggression, although no finding of racist or anti-Semitic abuse was made. The Societies were prevented from organising social events out of College for the remainder of the academic year. Events in College were allowed subject to supervision.

The students who reported the abuse were extremely disappointed with significant deficiencies in the way that Christ's College had handled the complaint and felt their report had not been taken as seriously as might other reports of racial abuse. Jewish organisations, including the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD), and the Community Security Trust (CST) wrote to the College to express their concern at the deficiencies in the handling of the complaints. Jewish Human Rights Watch assisted the reporting students. Following a constructive meeting with the students who reported the abuse and the Chief Executive of the JLC, the College makes the following statement.

The Master, on behalf of the College has sincerely apologised to the students. After the conclusion of the original disciplinary process, the College had commissioned an external group of legal experts, Dame Janet Smith, Sir Martin Moore-Bick and Professor Graham Zellick, to deliver an independent report examining the College's handling of the complaint and making recommendations so that, in future, those making complaints to the College would have confidence that they would be handled properly.

The experts' report, which was shared with the reporting students, the JLC, BOD and CST, found that, though there was no bad faith or intention to cover up, there were significant failings in how the College responded to the complaint.

First, the investigation process followed by the College failed to identify any person who was or might have been guilty of the reported anti-Semitism so it was not possible to charge any student with it. Correspondence to alumni and public announcements on behalf of the College from the Master inadvertently gave the seriously misleading impression that the reporting students' account of anti-Semitic abuse had been rejected by the College and this caused considerable hurt and dismay to the reporting students and others in the Jewish community.

A second major mistake in the College's handling of this incident was that once it concluded that no individual wrongdoer could be identified, it did not ask the more general question of whether it was probable that the abuse had occurred and, if so, what further measures could be taken.

The College has now done so and, having considered all the available material, including audio-less video footage and the reporting students' accounts which corroborated each other, concluded that

there probably was substance to their complaint, that anti-Semitic abuse had indeed occurred and that a group of Christ's students, albeit unidentified, were responsible for that abuse.

A third serious mistake was that the complainants were not invited to the College to be interviewed, the College did not explain to them how the process worked and they were not told why it had not been possible to charge any student with the anti-Semitism alleged.

The experts made a series of recommendations to reform the College's disciplinary processes. As a result, the College is actively implementing the necessary reforms. In particular, the College has agreed to overhaul its entire complaints, training, investigation, record-keeping and disciplinary machinery.

First, the new disciplinary code will separate the College's pastoral and disciplinary provision, creating a Dean responsible for discipline and a separate adjudication panel for serious cases such as racist and anti-Semitic abuse.

Secondly, it will ensure that complainants are fully informed of and included in the complaints process so that they have the opportunity to give their accounts fully and respond to the accounts of others.

Thirdly, the new code will include a procedure for investigating a complaint of alleged wrongdoing even though it may be impossible to identify the wrongdoer. This will allow the central issue of whether wrongdoing occurred to be addressed so that it can be clearly acknowledged, condemned and recorded.

Finally, the reforms will address the significant problem that the present Statutes of the College only provide for individual disciplinary action and do not clearly address how groups such as societies may be regulated. In future the College will have explicitly defined powers to exercise appropriate regulatory authority over the affairs of student societies and to impose restrictions, conditions and penalties as appropriate.

It is deeply regrettable that no member of the sporting societies has come forward to admit responsibility for the abuse. In the light of this and the fact that the College has concluded that there probably was substance to the students' complaint, it has decided that, unless those responsible admit the abuse, the ban on the societies holding social events out of College will remain in place until October 2019.

Christ's is a thriving, diverse and tolerant community. Though this disgraceful incident of racial and anti-Semitic abuse was an isolated one, it should never have happened and is abhorrent to the core values of the College.

The College has met with and expressed its sincere regret to the complainants. It shares with them great concern that students should feel confident that such serious complaints of any nature are handled properly. The decisive reforms the College is putting in place reflect Christ's firm commitment to that goal. We are most grateful to the reporting students who, at considerable personal cost, came forward and shed light on the need for this important institutional reform.

Professor Jane Stapleton, Master of Christ's College, said

"The College accepts that racist and anti-Semitic conduct occurred and has apologised to the students who reported it. The incident also revealed significant deficiencies in College procedures and in response the College is overhauling its entire complaints, training, investigation, record-keeping and disciplinary machinery with the assistance of external legal experts. We greatly regret the deficiencies in the way the complaints were originally handled and have taken further measures against the two student societies involved. The Jewish community can be reassured that if there were to be a similar incident in the future the College would address it robustly. A new concept of group responsibility will be recognised in College procedures to deal effectively with cases where wrongdoers fail to take responsibility."

On behalf of the reporting students, Shlomo Roiter-Jesner, said "We are satisfied that Christ's is now comfortable giving credence to our story, admitting that anti-Semitic conduct occurred and taking decisive steps to improve their disciplinary system. Particularly given the increase in reported anti-Semitism across the country, we hope people in Cambridge, especially students, will feel secure in speaking out against racist and anti-Semitic abuse in the future."

Simon Johnson, Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council, said

"I am grateful to the Master of Christ's College for recognising the deficiencies of the College's structures for dealing with complaints of racist abuse, for commissioning an independent report and indicating her willingness to accept the recommendations. It is important that victims of racist abuse have confidence that their complaints will be robustly investigated and dealt with."