



Statement from Oriel College on 28th January 2016 regarding the College's decision concerning the Rhodes statue.

Over the past few months, there has been intense debate about how Cecil Rhodes is commemorated in Oxford, and particularly about the Rhodes statue on Oriel College's High Street frontage. Oriel believes that this issue needs to be addressed in a spirit of free speech and open debate, with a readiness to listen to divergent views. The College's intention, by releasing its statement in December was to open debate and listen to the response. Since that announcement we have received an enormous amount of input including comments from students and academics, alumni, heritage bodies, national and student polls and a further petition, as well as over 500 direct written responses to the College. The overwhelming message we have received has been in support of the statue remaining in place, for a variety of reasons.

Following careful consideration, the College's Governing Body has decided that the statue should remain in place, and that the College will seek to provide a clear historical context to explain why it is there. The College will do the same in respect of the plaque to Rhodes in King Edward Street. The College believes the recent debate has underlined that the continuing presence of these historical artefacts is an important reminder of the complexity of history and of the legacies of colonialism still felt today. By adding context, we can help draw attention to this history, do justice to the complexity of the debate, and be true to our educational mission.

The previously announced listening exercise will focus on how best to place the statue and plaque in a clear historical context. The College will seek expert advice on parallels and precedents, and conduct focused discussions with the College community, including students, staff and alumni. The Governing Body expects to have identified specific proposals by the autumn.

The campaign to remove Oriel's statue of Rhodes has highlighted other challenges in relation to the experience and representation of black and minority ethnic students and staff at Oxford. Oriel takes these very seriously and, as previously announced, is taking substantive steps to address them. The College supports the work the University is doing in this area, and reaffirms Oriel's commitment to being at the forefront of the drive to make Oxford more diverse and inclusive of people from all backgrounds.