

## **Statement by the Oxford Union**

On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2019, Ebenezer Azamati, a member of the Oxford Union, sought to attend one of its debates. Mr Azamati is blind and Black. Mr Azamati was initially turned away. He was subsequently admitted but then steps were taken to remove him by force. He eventually left voluntarily. Shortly afterwards, disciplinary proceedings were wrongly brought against Mr Azamati alleging violence and dishonesty. The allegations and initial findings against him were made public. All the allegations against him were withdrawn on appeal, the findings were set aside and he was rightly cleared of any wrongdoing.

These events have unsurprisingly led to calls for root and branch changes to be made at the Union to align its actions with the progressive values it seeks to champion, including being fully welcoming, open and accessible to all those who wish to hear and contribute to the exchange and debate of ideas which the Union exists to promote, particularly those of marginalised and underrepresented people.

The Union unreservedly accepts the force of these calls for institutional change and has recognised that we need external, expert help to comprehensively identify what is wrong and what changes will best address it.

We also accept that the allegations of dishonesty and violence made against Mr Azamati by the Union have caused acute distress to Mr Azamati and serious harm to his reputation. We accept that those allegations are wholly unfounded and untrue, and we apologise for making the statements that contained them. What happened to Mr Azamati was fundamentally wrong. We apologise to him unreservedly and have made a compensatory payment to him in recognition of this. We must ensure that we become an institution in which such an incident can never recur. We are committed to that change.

Following discussions with Mr Azamati and his representatives, we have agreed to commission an independent Equality and Access Review to be undertaken by two specialist lawyers. They will closely examine our rules, policies, procedures, practices, staff roles and responsibilities and training requirements to identify any changes that are legally required, otherwise necessary, or desirable. The Review will seek the input of interested persons and produce a report with recommendations. The Review Report will be published in the interests of full transparency. We will also seek comments on what is recommended and will then make decisions on how to implement necessary changes. In the interim, we have introduced reforms including staff and Standing Committee member training on disability access and equality so practical changes can begin as soon as possible.