

History Dialogue Summary

After Imperial's independent History Group published their [report](#) in October, Imperial began a community dialogue.

Hundreds of Imperial staff, students and alumni engaged in that history dialogue, through written submissions, participation in facilitated small group discussions, in addition to conversations within the community.

A wide spectrum of views and ideas were aired. The community shared differing personal, professional and political views and beliefs that were sometimes uncomfortable, challenging and rooted in deep experiences of injustice and discrimination. This frank and open approach often brought people together and aided understanding between Imperial people from different backgrounds, generations and viewpoints.

A summary of key themes emerging from the dialogue is below.

Principles and processes

- There was a general consensus in the facilitated workshops that this History Dialogue and the process of reflection and consultation was a valuable opportunity to review and align Imperial to become an equitable and inclusive organisation.
- Views on the report and the way it was produced were varied and wideranging - some welcomed the report and valued its structure, pitch, rigour and recommendations, whilst others were critical of the report and felt it lacked rigorous academic analysis of Imperial's past and key figures like Huxley.
- Many respondents expressed concerns about the risk of "erasing" history, while others praised the College's explicit support for free speech and determination to avoid so-called "cancel culture" as the community learns more about its past.
- There was a desire that these positive dialogues would not be a 'one off' exercise as it was seen as an evolving process of examining inequality and racism that needed to be continued. The History Group's report felt to be a very positive start of this process.

Views on how the College currently recognises and reflects specific individuals/activity

- There were different perspectives as to the way in which the identified figures should be acknowledged.
- Participants had mixed views on the History Report's suggestions on the removal of statues, busts, and historical artifacts. Some participants felt such items should be removed when possible as they are a daily reminder of enslavement and colonial legacy and not a reflection of the College current values. Others felt pride in the great achievements of science and engineering that they represent.
- Many alumni correspondents, along with significant numbers of staff and some students, opposed renaming the Huxley building. There was consensus that Huxley was a 'towering figure' in the field of science and pivotal to Imperial's founding. Many participants expressed their pride and deeply value his prominent status and especially the name of the Huxley Building. Many felt that the History Group's report gave insufficient recognition to Huxley's contributions to the field of science, development of primary education, the establishment of science as part of the school curriculum, and his activities and actions in the latter part of his life with the abolition movement.
- Others said they felt unwelcomed and rejected by Huxley's links to eugenics, leading to feelings of marginalisation, disrespect, hurt and offence. Some that marking his legacy without this context had a negative effect on Imperial's aspirations to equality and inclusion and its global standing.
- There were differing views as to the importance of people being the product of their times, and whether to judge them by current morals and values. Many say it is not right to judge

historical figures like Huxley by today's standards, and instead they should be considered in the context of their time. Others note that not all contemporaries of Huxley shared his views on race – not least Black people of that time.

- Relatively few opposed or commented in detail on the renaming of Beit, although some key stakeholders expressed dismay at the proposal, noting Beit's important role in the College's founding and the good work of the Beit Foundation.
- Throughout the process, there was very strong support for finding ways to recognise figures and achievements from Imperial's past that may be lesser-known or undercelebrated such as Abdus Salam and Margaret Fishenden.

Ideas put forward

- Some participants supported the idea of keeping names and statues in situ with explanatory plaques. Others wanted new figures identified to replace them.
- One idea voiced was to hyphenate the name of the Huxley building to something like Huxley-Salam, if the families agreed, enabling a deeper understanding of both Huxley's "unacceptable and poorly informed" views on race as well as his achievements, alongside the great achievements of a figure like Salam, while underlining Imperial's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Some proposed developing a museum or similar entity to explain the complex contributions and sometimes problematic aspects of the figures concerned within the historical context of their work. Partnerships with the V&A or Natural History Museum were mooted, as was taking inspiration from the Liverpool Slavery Museum.
- Several saw the process of naming and recognition as something that should be reviewed regularly, and an ordinary part of institutional change.
- Some proposed identifying buildings and scholarships based on their specific subject or function, like the 'Chemistry building' or 'award for excellent early career research'
- Some participants suggested the need for a Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine - as was formerly hosted at Imperial - to inform STEM disciplines from a historical, social and humanities perspective.
- Some felt that Imperial needed to do more to tackle racial inequalities and racism on a deeper institutional level, especially with regards to the representation and progression of Black and minoritised students within Imperial, rather than focusing on changing the names of buildings.
- Decolonising the curriculum: some felt that the most significant impact could be made by ensuring that the teaching curricula enables reflection on the historical context of key figures, making clear how their actions or ideas have affected Black and minoritised Communities and identifying contributions that have been overlooked.

Wider reflections and suggestions

Participants also made several points that were beyond the scope of the History Group's report and its subsequent dialogue, the contents of which will still be shared with President's Board. These include:

- The name 'Imperial College London' itself. Some participants advocated reviewing and rethinking the name; others disagreed. Several felt the History Dialogue should have included the College name in its remit. Some expressed dismay and hoped that the College's name would not now be called into question.
- Some felt that Imperial ought to be reflecting more deeply on its present relationships, as well as those from its past, as these could be looked back on negatively in the near future. It was felt the College ought to reexamine current partnership arrangements, funding, investments and donors and with regard to various environmental and ethical concerns