



Statement from the Master regarding the outcome of the investigations into complaints about the appointment of Research Fellow – 30 April 2019

Summary

St Edmund's College has today announced the outcome of the investigations it launched into the appointment of the Toby Jackman Newton Trust Research Fellow, Dr Noah Carl.

The College launched two separate formal investigations following complaints made by its student body, the Combination Room, at the end of November last year. Following Dr Carl's arrival in College matters emerged about some of his activities and connections linking him to far right extremists and the Combination Room questioned how he had come to be appointed by the College.

The College's formal investigations have overall upheld the majority of the Combination Room complaints. At a special meeting of the College's Governing Body today, the Governing Body voted to adopt the findings and recommendations contained in the reports. The College has terminated Dr Carl's appointment to the Research Fellowship.

Statement

St Edmund's convened two investigations into the complaints. One was led by Sir Patrick Elias, a retired Court of Appeal Judge. This external review concerned the recruitment process, to address concerns expressed in the complaint about the way in which the appointment of the Research Fellow had been handled by the College.

The other investigation was led by Life Fellow, Professor Michael Herrtage, who chaired a Special Investigation Panel to review the complaints about certain of Dr Carl's research activities and connections. The Combination Room complained that these demonstrated poor scholarship, promoted extreme right-wing views and incited racial and religious hatred. The Combination Room said that the appointment of a Fellow holding such views violated the dignity of members of the College.

Sir Patrick found that the College had followed an established inter-college procedure for making such research fellow appointments. He rejected the complaints that there were failings in the recruitment procedure. Dr Carl had provided the information requested by the application process and based on that information, the College fairly selected Dr Carl as the best candidate. To be fair to all candidates, the recruitment process considered only the information sought in the application and which all candidates supplied. Job applicants are required to be honest but are not subject to a duty of candour. The separate matters giving rise to the concerns about Dr Carl only came to light after the recruitment process was concluded. Nevertheless, Sir Patrick has made a number of recommendations for changes to the recruitment procedure in the future, which the Governing Body has taken on board.

The complaints considered by Special Investigation Panel chaired by Professor Herrtage related to the activities and connections of Dr Carl that had subsequently come to the College's attention after his appointment. The panel substantially upheld these complaints. The panel found that Dr Carl had put a body of work into the public domain that did not comply with established criteria for research ethics and integrity. In any event, it considered that the poor scholarship of this problematic body of Dr Carl's work, among other things, meant that it fell outside any protection that might otherwise be claimed for academic freedom of speech.

Furthermore, the panel found that, in the course of pursuing this problematic work, Dr Carl had collaborated with a number of individuals who were known to hold extremist views. There was a serious risk that Dr Carl's appointment could lead, directly or indirectly, to the College being used as a platform to promote views that could incite racial or religious hatred, and bring the College into disrepute.

In addition, the panel also noted that the way in which Dr Carl has conducted himself with regard to his publications and the ideas he has expressed have had a detrimental effect on the atmosphere within the College with feelings of hurt, betrayal, anger and disbelief that the College could be associated with such views.

In light of these findings, on behalf of the Governing Body and myself, I apologise unreservedly for the hurt and offence felt by all members of the Combination Room. Diversity and inclusivity are fundamental values of the College and we abhor racism and religious hatred. There are lessons we must learn about how we demonstrate the importance of these values and we will take action to repair the damage that has been caused to our College community. The priority now is for all members of College to address the harm caused by this matter and to work constructively together to heal the divisions and restore relationships.

I would like to thank Sir Patrick and Professor Herrtage, together with other members of the Special Investigation Panel and all those who gave evidence in the investigations, for the thoroughness of the inquiries into the Combination Room complaints. It was essential to ensure that the College observed both due process and natural justice to ensure all matters were considered fairly and all relevant issues were given due weight. Dr Carl was given full opportunity to answer the criticisms made of his work and he did so in two sets of written submissions and in meetings with both Sir Patrick Elias and with the Special Investigation Panel.

The College responded to the allegations in a responsible and measured way to comply with its legal obligations and all its various duties of care. This includes the College's commitment to uphold the principle of academic freedom of speech. The College supports research which may be controversial or sensitive provided the work conforms to accepted standards of research ethics and integrity and is undertaken with appropriately rigorous methodology.

The outcome is that some aspects of Dr Carl's work do not fulfil the criteria we expected for academic scholarship. Those findings made Dr Carl's position as a Research Fellow at St Edmund's untenable.

We appointed Dr Carl based on his academic achievements at the University of Oxford, and on the commendations which supported his application. It is regrettable that such an appointment has been compromised by Dr Carl's other activities of which we were completely unaware when electing him to the Fellowship.

MATTHEW BULLOCK
MASTER