



26 June 2020

Dear Senior Members,

As we approach the end of 9<sup>th</sup> week of Trinity Term, I would like to share with you some thoughts on this academic year, which has been like no other.

We lost an entire Trinity Term to COVID-19 lockdown, with the College closing to all but essential maintenance functions in March. Staff who could perform their jobs remotely have been working from home. Those who could not have been placed on furlough. Our academics have risen to the challenge magnificently, developing remote methods of teaching and open book examinations for our students. Other staff members have been equally committed and have performed their duties in a totally exemplary way. Our students too have been outstanding in their acceptance of a hitherto unknown Oxford experience. They all deserve praise for their resilience, determination and success in getting us through the last months. Some College members have shared their experiences via our blog series, [Postcards from St Hilda's](#). I am inordinately proud of, and grateful to, the entire College for the demonstration of wonderful adaptability and uncomplaining acceptance of the inevitable. People did remain calm, and did carry on with admirable resolve, and together we got through this [virtual Trinity Term](#) without major disaster.

However, we have all been horrified, shocked and saddened by events in the United States, UK, and elsewhere in recent weeks.

St Hilda's College condemns totally all racism, and discrimination in all its forms. The College was founded to right a wrong, so that women could continue to the highest levels of education. We remain true to this founding principle of equality for all.

Following recent terrible happenings, with other Heads of House I signed a letter of solidarity with black students that was published in the [Guardian on 4 June](#). I also signed an [open letter to Oxford students](#), published on the University of Oxford's website on 10 June. In this, we summarised the initiatives that are being put in place to combat discrimination of all kinds.

We are committed to making St Hilda's an inclusive community that is free from any kind of prejudice or injustice. We have a strong team to support this, including a Welfare Panel, an Equality and Diversity Fellow, a Disability Lead, Transgender Lead, the College Counsellor and Harassment Advisers. These are appropriate offices in a college such as St Hilda's, but we must aim proactively to take actions to eradicate racism and inequalities.

As an academic institution, our most valuable tools in the struggle against inequality are our teaching and research, broadening the understanding of challenges that face humankind around the world.

To this end, in addition to working with the College community, we continue to hold events aimed at a wider audience, to share and influence external views, policies and practices. With the [Climax Centre for Clinical Therapeutics](#), we are creating a world-leading centre of research excellence, placing St Hilda's at the forefront of interdisciplinary thinking about the future of medicines development and global health equality. In March this year the Centre welcomed Dr Nick Cammack, Head of the Wellcome Trust's Snakebite team to deliver its Hilary Term lecture on 'Snakebite: the

case for action and the need for innovation in treatment approaches', which proposed ways of dealing with one of the world's biggest, but least-recognised, killers in rural communities.

We maintain our established reputation for proactively seeking opportunities to hold such events. The Principal's Seminar in Michaelmas Term 2020 will be given by the three authors of a much-acclaimed book, published recently by OUP, which contributes importantly to thinking about economic development and inequalities in different countries and regions of the African Continent, [\*African Economic Development: Evidence, Theory, Policy\*](#) by Christopher Cramer, John Sender and Arkebe Oqubay.

You can find out more about these important events, including the annual Lady English Lecture and the Sue Lloyd-Roberts Memorial Lecture series, on our [website](#).

We continue to be proud of our past and present students' efforts to promote equality and diversity in the College and University. Our recent alumna, Lamis Hamdi (Medicine, 2016), won the 2020 Vice Chancellor's Diversity Award for Champion or Role Model. St Hilda's JCR runs an annual Feminist Festival, which started life as a gender equality week in 2009, and to which external speakers are invited to address key issues. The first JCR-run Cultural Fair happened in 2019. Both the JCR and MCR have BAME, Welfare and LGBTQ Officers, and Peer Supporters.

We will continue to work with members of our College community to identify areas in which we need to improve and to ensure that we offer a welcoming and supportive environment for all. We especially want to promote open discussion and frank debate about actions that can, and should, be taken to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

I hope that everyone stays well and can enjoy as much of the summer as circumstances allow. I look forward to welcoming our new and returning students and staff in Michaelmas Term, and to seeing all friends of St Hilda's back at College soon.

My best wishes to all.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gordon Duff". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Professor Sir Gordon Duff  
Principal, St Hilda's College