

Questions University College London must answer on eugenics conference

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The exposure by a student newspaper that University College London (UCL) hosted an annual eugenics conference on four occasions led the university to promise an investigation.

UCL claimed ignorance in January of the London Conference on Intelligence (LCI), which was attended by a range of fascistic individuals and organised by UCL honorary senior lecturer, James Thompson.

Thompson asserts that global inequalities are the product of global variations in IQ. He claims that certain ethnic minorities are capable only of making a poor contribution to the UK, due to their asserted IQ deficiencies, and that those of a right-wing political disposition are genetically intellectually superior to those on the left. He advises screening African Americans on the basis that they are more likely to be psychotic than other population groups.

In response to the revelations, UCL initially issued a short and equivocating statement. The only concrete action it took was to suspend Thompson's room booking privileges and approach him for an explanation. Having come under pressure from students and academics after weeks of stonewalling, the university has since published two further comments. These finally and explicitly state that UCL does not endorse the London Conference on Intelligence and announce the formation of an inquiry team to "investigate the Conferences, the way in which they ostensibly breached external booking procedures and the circumstances in which the organiser [James Thompson] was awarded an honorary senior lectureship." Such statements should be met with justified scepticism. In the first place, what circumstances could possibly have justified awarding an honorary position to an individual with views like Thompson's?

UCL's provost may claim, "I personally have no support for eugenics and I regard it as complete nonsense. I am appalled by the concept of white supremacy." But he is speaking for an institution making the ludicrous claim that its leading personnel were somehow so unaware of Thompson's professional activities that they did not know he specializes in propagating complete nonsense and has connections with white supremacists.

Thompson's academic and Twitter output are characterised almost solely by an obsession with genetic differences in intelligence across genders, countries and ethnicities and by association with the fascistic right.

Further questions must also be asked about how Thompson was able to host a eugenics conference attended by the far-right on UCL's campus for four years in a row without this coming to anyone's attention. In their statement, UCL refer to their room booking procedure having been breached. The university's "Code of practice on freedom of speech: arrangements for the management of meetings and other functions held on UCL premises" reads:

"In the case of meetings or functions deemed by UCL to come within the provisions of this Code of Practice, the names of visiting speakers must be approved by UCL prior to invitation." And further: "When a member of UCL wishes to hold a meeting or function which is not directly related to UCL's academic or administrative business on UCL's premises, a written request must be made to Room and Conference Bookings, Estates and Facilities Division."

These written requests are required to include the names of speakers, the subject of the meeting and the "Precise timing of expected arrival and departure of any speaker(s)."

Furthermore: “If the Room and Conference Bookings Office receives a request by a member of UCL to book a room for an event which appears might not be in connection with official UCL business, the requestor shall be asked for such information as is reasonably required to establish that the purpose of the booking is to accommodate a bona fide UCL meeting or function. Bookings will not be confirmed until such information has been obtained.”

Why was Thompson allowed to bypass these requirements? Or did he flat-out lie about the nature of his meetings?

It would not have taken a Sherlock Holmes to discover the truth. One need only type the search terms “J Thompson,” “UCL” and “Conference” into Google to bring up links to PDF agendas of the 2015 and 2016 Conferences, whose listed speeches include, “Evolutionary indicators for explaining cross-country differences in cognitive ability” and “Race and sex differences in occupational achievement.” Both are on UCL-headed paper and the 2016 document provides the exact location of the meeting, “G22 Lecture Theatre, Pearson Building, UCL.”

Information about the 2014 and 2015 Conferences was freely available on certain websites. Regular LCI attendee and neo-Nazi Emil Kirkegaard wrote about the event on his blog, saying “The second London Conference on Intelligence will take place the 8-10 May in London at University College London. The conference follows 2014’s successful version.” Kirkegaard’s advertisement was re-reported by the far-right, white supremacist website VDARE.

Then there are Thompson’s own blog posts. On March 1, 2015, on the website *Unz Review*, he asked his readers, “Would you be interested in attending the London Conference on Intelligence, to be held over a long weekend in May?”

On April 24, he announced: “The Conference begins on Friday 8th May at 2 pm and ends on Sunday 10th May at 1 pm and takes place in central London.” He listed a sample of the papers to be discussed, including: “A Meta-analysis of Roma Intelligence: an update.”

Another blog post by Thompson, published May 19, 2016, “London Conference on Intelligence 2016: Population Genetics,” included a link to an online presentation with the header “London Conference on Intelligence, 13-15 May 2016, G22 Lecture Theatre,

Pearson Building, UCL London.”

Just who do UCL’s leadership think they are kidding by pleading ignorance? As their statement acknowledges, the whole field of eugenics is a hot-button issue for the institution.

Even now that Thompson has been exposed, the university is acting with uncharacteristic concern for its lecturer’s position despite his organizing clandestine gatherings of individuals who have called for “the phasing out of inadequate populations.”

This is in marked contrast to its treatment of Professor Tim Hunt in June 2015.

Hunt was also an honorary lecturer at UCL, but the parallels with Thompson end there. Hunt is a Nobel laureate held in great esteem in his field. He was forced out of his position at UCL—despite substantial support from the scientific community—following a media witch-hunt over certain, at the very worst, misjudged (and subsequently misconstrued) comments about women in science. His wife, a highly respected immunologist, explained how she had received a call from UCL giving her husband the push: “I was told by a senior that Tim had to resign immediately or be sacked.”

UCL’s administration was quick to impose severe disciplinary action over a misjudged attempt at humour. But when it comes to the case of a far-right supporting eugenicist who personally invited neo-Nazis and paedophilia-advocates to a secret conference, a prolonged inquiry is apparently required “in the interests of natural justice.”

If the university is struggling to build a case against Thompson, then the WSWS would suggest the above facts, collected during a few hours of serious journalistic work, may be of interest.

In truth, the inquiry into Thompson and the London Conference on Intelligence has been set up as a delaying tactic—in the hope that popular attention will move on from the fact that UCL honoured such a deeply reactionary thinker and gave him free rein on its campus.



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