


Update 23/2/2021: The Principal and Head of College of Social Sciences have replied. The Principal expresses understanding and thanks for colleagues sharing concerns. The title of the paper is recognised as offensive. There are suggestions of an event where the re-titled paper would be presented alongside alternate views.

Update 17/2/2021: This letter was sent to the Principal Sir Anton Muscattelli, cc'ing Head of the Business School, VP for Racial Equality, Head of the Applied Economics Cluster, and Rector at around 5 pm on 17 February. Please feel free to sign even if you missed this as we can continue to let the university leaders know the numbers of people who signed thereby expressing concern.

Glasgow, February 17th, 2021

Dear Principal,

As we welcome today's launch of the timely "Understanding Racism" report, we would also like to draw your attention to today's talk within the Business School Applied Economics seminars series (3.15pm). 

The talk revisits theories of genetic determination of social outcomes, notably the Bell Curve, aiming to corroborate these through an empirical inquiry. The naturalization of people's social positions is the ultimate conclusion of the paper, one reached while remaining silent about the vast amount of research confuting some of the paper's theoretical assumptions.

The paper's reliance on and promotion of discredited science, a branch of genetics which originated in explicitly racist assumptions and aims, is entirely inconsistent with the University's findings of its own racism investigation. The University's own action plan begins with the firm statement that university leadership is required for 'addressing systemic racial inequality...to build faith in the University's approach'. It is especially disheartening, not only in the face of this new policy but also in light of recent US events where the danger of false knowledge nearly disrupted an entire democracy, to host research presentations that are the social science equivalent of flat earth thinking. This is not about free speech, it is about the University's integrity and commitment to rigorous science, and its claimed commitment to understanding and challenging 'the nuances and subtleties of racism'. To the extent free speech is implicated, it is in the University's finding that students are unlikely to report racism because of their concerns about the response to it. Hosting talks such as this suggest these fears are founded.

We firmly oppose the circulation of genetically-determined ideas of any aspect of social worlds. Not only because those ideas have been overwhelmingly discredited by reputable and rigorous research, but because due to their history, their circulation as legitimate science has political implications that pose a danger to the mission of the University and the wellbeing of its community.

Signed,

Dear Professor Clark

Thank you for your email to the Principal and for copying in Professor John Finch. I understand you and John have met virtually since 17 February.

The Principal asked me to respond on his behalf, following discussion with colleagues. I understand that a decision was taken at School level to postpone your seminar due to a high number of additional registrations recorded in the hours immediately prior to the event. This became a cause of concern, and it was felt that the event was at significant risk of disruption.

Subsequently, academic colleagues have considered the title of your talk in light of concerns raised by many of our students and members of our faculty. While the University is perfectly willing for you to present your research, we request that the title of the seminar be modified. I understand that John has contacted you to this effect and to explain the reasoning behind the request.

I am afraid that the office does not share private correspondence addressed to the Principal. The letter to which you refer was not an open letter and, as such, it would be inappropriate for copy to be shared with you. I can also confirm that University management has no involvement with the editorial decisions made by the Glasgow Guardian – this is an independent student publication and all official statements from the University have refrained from using the language you cite. We would not use nor endorse such language.

I hope that your dialogue with John and the School continues but would reiterate the University's position that the original title of your seminar be amended.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona

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