

Oxford UCU Branch Motion

Passed at General Meeting on 7th November 2023

OXSAAF (Oxford South Asian Alternative Forum)

On the 23rd of June, I (Holly Cooper) attended a Roundtable Discussion facilitated by Oxford South Asian Alternative Forum (OXSAAF), which was part of their day-long conference on Caste beyond South Asia. The discussion looked to interested parties, including the UCU, the Oxford SU, the City Council, and others, to discuss the exclusion of 'caste' as a protected characteristic, as well as caste-based discrimination within UK institutions. The organisation is working together, with INDOX and other university bodies, to create a framework which can be proposed to the university's EDI divisions.

The government response to caste discrimination is that, within case law, it falls under racial discrimination, and therefore, they see no reason to introduce legislation specifically outlawing caste discrimination. UCU published guidance in October 2019 regarding discrimination: '[Challenging Discrimination: How to Build an Effective Case](#)', and they gave guidance that echoes this inefficient government practice. The document opens with "UCU is committed to eliminating discrimination in the workplace" (p.4), however, regarding caste, it refers to case law which argues that caste discrimination falls under race. This is a harmful oversimplification.

In 2023, Seattle became the first jurisdiction outside of South Asia to ban caste-based discrimination. Since 2020, a host of top US universities have amended their policies to ban caste discrimination, including Brandeis University, Harvard University, the University of California, and Brown University. In June 2023, [SOAS SU implemented a Caste Campaign](#), as a step towards inclusivity and social justice. On a more local level, in May 2023, the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development and Somerville College launched the [Savitribai Phule Graduate Scholarship](#). There is a changing atmosphere outside the Global South towards caste recognition within discrimination practices, and the University of Oxford should be paving the way in the UK.

My attendance as the incoming Equalities Officer of Oxford UCU at the discussion was well received, and I have voiced support for the project on behalf of the branch. I also feel it necessary to propose a motion.

This branch notes ...

1. The University of Oxford's equality policy covers discrimination on the groups of "age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins), religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, or sexual orientation", and refers to them as 'protected characteristics', however, the policy omits discrimination based on caste.
2. This omission from the University's equality policy leaves students and staff coming from marginalised castes unprotected from harassment and bullying.
3. This omission also exists within the UCU's own guidance.
4. OXSAAF's (Oxford South Asian Alternative Forum) work in the creation of a framework that engages with preventive and punitive aspects of casteism is urgent and necessary.

This branch believes ...

1. Discrimination based on caste should have no place within the University of Oxford, and within the UCU.

2. The Oxford Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU) must work with OXSAAF in adding caste as one of its 'Equality Themes' on its website, as well as providing tailored support for complaints of caste discrimination.
3. The EDU must work with OXSAAF in the creation of workshops, sensitisation programs, and training for students, faculty, and staff, in the education of overt and covert practices of caste-based discrimination.

This branch resolves ...

1. To recognise 'caste' as a protected characteristic separate, at a local level, and to work meaningfully with OXSAAF to implement training and awareness within the branch.
2. Support OXSAAF in their negotiations and discussions with the University, regarding their 'anti-caste discrimination' framework.
3. Make a solidarity donation of £1,500 to OXSAAF in support of their work.
4. To meet with the UCU Regional Forum to discuss meaningful changes to anti-discriminatory guidance that includes 'caste' as a protected characteristic.