



15<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Mr Young,

Thank you for your letter in which you outline the concerns and possible implications felt by one of our students regarding our Unconscious Bias Training. My colleagues and I are always eager to hear of any concerns felt by our students, and will always do whatever we can to clarify or, where appropriate, correct our strategy for their benefit.

The first point that I would like to make in response to your letter is to say that all the work which we are currently doing to create an inclusive, supportive community at Somerville College is informed by our commitment to free speech for all of our members. For us, freedom of speech is strengthened, not eroded by dialogue, and it is in this spirit of asking our students to reflect inwardly and engage outwardly about their biases that we introduced Unconscious Bias Training. As a side-note, one might even say that the receipt of your letter questioning our actions, and our ability now to engage in a constructive debate about the issue, offers welcome proof that such freedoms remain in good health within our universities and wider society.

There is, of course, a larger point to debate concerning the legitimacy and value of Unconscious Bias Training. You are clearly not persuaded by the evidence which suggests that there is value in reflecting upon one's own implicit or unconscious biases. Others are persuaded. Ultimately, the science will reach a verdict – one by which we all must abide. Until then, what is clearly incontestable is that a plethora of systemic injustices exist in our society, and that these harmful systemic injustices derive from individual unconscious biases from which many or all of us suffer. The potential harm of systemic injustices was laid bare for us all last year by the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and too many others. If 2020 taught us nothing else, it is that sitting back and doing nothing more than express a performative sympathy in the face of such grotesque injustice is not an option, nor would it be acceptable to the vast majority of our students and staff who support Unconscious Bias Training and who expect my colleagues and I to embody the positive and inclusive ethos on which our College was founded.

The next point I would like to address is the wish expressed in my original message that students should achieve one hundred per cent in the test. This is one area where I should have thought further, and I thank you for bringing it to my attention. On reflection, it has been agreed that completing the test with less than 100% will be seen as the opportunity for a chat about the issues involved, nothing more. As I said above, everything we do at Somerville is underwritten by our commitment to free speech – so engaging in a dialogue about these questions can only be a positive step, leading us to learn more about one another.

Finally, I am happy to confirm that there was never even the slightest question of disciplinary action following a student not completing the test or scoring less than 100%. I can also confirm that the results of the tests are strictly confidential and that preserving the rights and freedoms of our students remains at the heart of our work.

I thank you once again for your letter and wish you well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jan Royall', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and 'R'.

Jan Royall