



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

18 November 2020

Dr Stuart Blackie
President of the Edinburgh University Club of London

Dear Stuart,

Thank you for writing and I note the views of the Edinburgh University Club of London. My apologies for the slight delay in responding, we are not accessing our offices due to following the current restrictions guidance and so there is a delay in collecting post.

We recognise that there is significant strength of feeling and a wide range of views across the University community on this issue and the interim decision we have taken over the David Hume Tower. This decision was taken, and timed, as explained in the full statement (appended), out of pragmatism and sensitivity to concerns amongst our current students, whom you will doubtless appreciate have faced a very turbulent year. This decision was taken in good faith, and influential amongst many views was the one of the black student who said that he felt deeply uncomfortable being in a building named after someone who considered him a lesser being than other humans. As a white person myself, I find it difficult to dismiss or trivialise the lived experience of one of our black students, or to categorise the discomfort as "woke" or "snowflake" as some have done.

We have complex constituencies with which to interact and are undertaking a comprehensive review of the University's past relationship with attitudes that would today be regarded as unacceptable. This will not be an easy process but we do believe it is necessary. As a university, we are both a diverse community and an ancient institution. We believe that better understanding, recognising and deeply reflecting on our past to build a more inclusive, safe and secure environment should lie at the heart of what our university is. We are anticipating that alumni will have a chance to express their views on this matter as part of the Review that is mentioned in the statement, before a final decision is taken.

Regarding Hume specifically, we continue to be committed to teaching, researching and understanding Hume in all his facets. Indeed, our Philosophy department has recently appointed three Hume experts so that far from cutting our links with him we are actively expanding the study of his work. Colleagues in Philosophy have suggested some very constructive ways of taking the debate forward. I was also interested to read in the Telegraph on 17 September that the Hume Society has expressed support for our decision. If you have internet access, there are a couple of blogs that you might find of interest: Professor of Political and Historical Sociology, Jonathan Hearn, recently wrote a thoughtful piece on the subject - <https://uneasyessays.com/2020/09/13/remembering-hume/> and this blog featuring some of our current academic staff who reflect different but well-informed view points - <https://padlet.com/alixcohen/ym8j0xolmeyht57q>

We also fully understand that on an issue such as this one, it will not be possible to please everyone.

With best regards,

Peter

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