



8th July 2020

Dear Professor Richardson,

**An Open Letter to the University of Oxford regarding
the wellbeing of its members from Hong Kong**

We, as the three societies serving the Hong Kong community at the University of Oxford, are writing this open letter to address concerns raised by distressed members in response to the recent developments in Hong Kong.

In the past year, some of our members and those with connections to Hong Kong have been distressed by the intense conflicts and rapid changes in Hong Kong. The recent legislation of the National Security Law with its far-reaching implications, including but not limited to the fact that the Law operates outside Hong Kong and on any nationals (Articles 36–38)¹, has raised serious concerns about civil liberties and struck fear into the Hong Kong community in Oxford. Many are not only worried about themselves in Oxford, but also their friends, families, and the on-going social turmoil at home.

Amidst unprecedented circumstances, some of our members have been facing different levels of discomfort and challenges in Oxford since the beginning of the academic year. We note that, due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, some event organisers encountered difficulties in securing venues for seminars and discussions regarding the social situations in Hong Kong. We are also aware that some students have been targets of doxxing because of the political opinions they expressed in public. We were even informed by some University staff of potential campaigns targeting Hong Kong members in the University. Incidents like these amplify the current distress amongst Hong Kong members, and even burden those who are not actively speaking up about politics.

Hong Kong members, despite being in Oxford, would be more reluctant than ever to reach out for help and support. We acknowledge that the University has to remain politically neutral, and appreciate the University's current commitment to safeguarding its members' wellbeing. The University of Oxford, as a world-leading academic institution, should honour fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression. We, therefore, plead for the following actions from the University, in order to support the academic and mental wellbeing of its members from Hong Kong:

- (1) Empathising with the difficulties that Hong Kong members are facing
 - (a) We hope the departments and colleges could alert college tutors, senior tutors, graduate supervisors, and welfare staff about the current situation and urge them to reach out to students and staff who may have experienced any difficulties since June 2019.
 - (b) Our reach is limited; thus, we encourage the University to survey students and staff from Hong Kong to ascertain the effect of the recent events back home on their studies, work and mental health.
 - (c) We hope the University could provide Hong Kong members with a route to confidentially document how the current events in their hometown affect their progress, and that tutors and supervisors could exercise flexibility on the workload and/or working pattern of those who have issues focusing or completing work under such extraordinary circumstances.
 - (d) We urge the University to dedicate more resources to counselling services and mental health first-aid for those in distress.
- (2) Strengthening the commitment to academic freedom and the freedom of speech and expression
 - (a) We believe the University should publicly reaffirm its commitment to academic freedom. Members of the University should be free to express their political opinions within the current code of practice².

- (b) Any proposals to hold events on University and College premises involving academic discussion and debates over issues in Hong Kong should be evaluated justly under the current policies of venue-booking. A culture of free, open, and robust discussion should be upheld. The mere sensitivity of the topic should not serve as grounds for rejection. Protection against harassment and other necessary support for such events should also be guaranteed.
- (3) Adopting zero tolerance to harassment and identifying clear reporting protocol
 - (a) The University should publicly reassure its members that any intimidation, harassment, or abuse against political views are unacceptable.
 - (b) Although the University has some general information on harassment on its websites, not all departments and colleges have established clear and approachable reporting procedures. We believe the University needs to develop its capacity for handling harassment related to political views, with particular attention to issues of confidentiality and potential conflict of interest. New members of the University should be made aware of the protocols in reporting harassment.
- (4) Offering legal support and handling suspension of study
 - (a) Since the Law operates broadly outside Hong Kong and on people of any nationality, the UK Foreign Travel Advice has noted an increased risk of detention, and deportation for any visitors³. Numerous exchange activities between Oxford and Hong Kong reveal the potential need for the University to investigate the Law in detail.
 - (b) If any student is arrested under the Law in the future, we hope the University will provide legal support and allow the students' study to suspend until the students can return to continue.

We plead with all members in the University to support friends and colleagues from Hong Kong as allies, by educating oneself on the matter, lending an ear, and offering emotional support, while being sensitive to what is told in confidence.

Finally, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to the wellbeing of Hong Kong members in Oxford. In the past, we have launched various social activities, wellbeing workshops, academic symposia, and seminars to cater to our members' academic and social needs. We will continue to serve the Hong Kong community in Oxford, and offer an open and safe platform to voice their concerns. We are keen to maintain an open dialogue with the University to discuss constructive ways forward in enhancing support to its members from Hong Kong.

Yours sincerely,

Oxford University Hong Kong Scholars Association (OxHKScholars)

Oxford University Hong Kong Society (OUHKS)

Oxford University Hong Kong Public Affairs and Social Services Society (OxHKPASS)

Established in 2015, OxHKScholars was founded with the aims to promote academic exchanges build relationships among Hong Kong scholars. Our diverse and vivid membership base encapsulates mostly graduate students, researchers, and visiting scholars at Oxford.

Established in 1978, the Oxford University Hong Kong Society brings together Hong Kong students at the University of Oxford to build a tight-knit support system that lasts beyond their time at Oxford.

Established in 2010, OxHKPASS is one of the few student societies at the University of Oxford that places a high emphasis on public affairs and social services. OxHKPASS has two main goals: to raise awareness on public issues and to increase involvement in contributing to society.

- [1] [Hong Kong national security law's long-arm jurisdiction 'extraordinary and chilling'. *South China Morning Post*](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3091428/hong-kong-national-security-laws-long-arm-jurisdiction)
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3091428/hong-kong-national-security-laws-long-arm-jurisdiction>
- [2] [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. *University of Oxford Gazette*](https://gazette.web.ox.ac.uk/files/codeofpracticeonfreedomofspeech-1tono5092pdf)
<https://gazette.web.ox.ac.uk/files/codeofpracticeonfreedomofspeech-1tono5092pdf>
- [3] [Foreign travel advice: Hong Kong. *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/hong-kong)
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/hong-kong>

All links accessed on 7th July 2020.