



**Second Town Hall meeting
on the history of eugenics at UCL**

11 October 2019, 15.00-17.00

AV Hill Lecture Theatre, Medical Sciences building

Welcome - Prof. Michael Arthur, Provost and President

The Provost welcomed participants and introduced the second Town Hall on the Inquiry into eugenics at UCL.

The Provost reiterated the context which led to the Inquiry being established, citing concerns raised by UCL students and staff about the legacy of Francis Galton, the discovery that an honorary member of UCL staff had arranged a 'London Conference on Intelligence' without UCL's prior knowledge. The Provost noted that 53% of UCL students are from BAME backgrounds and stressed that UCL wanted to create an aspirational environment for all students. The Provost introduced members of the Commission of Inquiry and handed over the floor to the independent Chair of the Inquiry, Professor Iyiola Solanke.

Introduction - Prof. Iyiola Solanke (IS), Chair of the Commission of Inquiry

Prof. Solanke thanked the Provost for the privilege of chairing this inquiry. The Chair noted that the final report from the Commission would be presented at a third and final Town Hall meeting in January, including findings and recommendations. This should form the start of a wider process.

Prof. Solanke presented key points setting out the mission which Galton set himself in relation of eugenics as he defined in *Inquiries into the Human Faculty*, 1883 and *Nature*, 1904: "Eugenics is the science which deals with all influences which improve the inborn qualities of a race". Prof. Solanke issued a trigger warning, noting that some terminology could be upsetting for participants.

The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry were set out, and Prof. Solanke outlined the activity of the Commission, specifically producing a bibliography to be made accessible online, appointing an archival researcher and an empirical researcher, and conducting 9 expert witness hearing sessions, in addition to 9 Commission meetings.

Prof. Solanke urged all present to complete the online questionnaire and to encourage staff and students at UCL to complete this before the deadline on 31/10.

Questions from the audience on Terms of Reference and process

1) Last year, a complaint was made by disabled students against a UCL academic. How do you plan to address existing and ongoing ableism at UCL?

IS: the initial focus of the Inquiry as set out in the Terms of Reference was on eugenics and racism, however the Commission has extended its scope to look at classism, sexism and ableism.

2) Will you create a focus group for disabled students?

IS: a session was organised for the Enable network, rather than disabled students specifically, but the researcher would be happy to talk about this if there is demand from disabled students.

3) For new UCL students, there has been no email about this survey. Where can we find details? New staff also would like a link to the survey.

Monica Bernal-Llanos (MBL, empirical researcher): Communications & Marketing (CAM) sent a reminder 2 weeks ago and MBL is sending fortnightly reminders to Faculty Tutors and departmental representatives. The next reminder is due to be sent on Monday 14/10.

CAM: there is a link on the UCL News page with a link to the survey. CAM will send out additional reminders.

Archival research: interim findings - Maria Kiladi (MK), Archival researcher

IS introduced MK who had completed a 4-month research assignment for the Inquiry, looking at UCL's archival collections, including uncatalogued material.

MK presented findings from archival research setting out the links between UCL and eugenics, including the early research undertaken in the Galton Laboratory, the role of Karl Pearson and the spread of eugenics in the UK and abroad.

Following the presentation, IS opened the floor for questions to MK.

Questions from the audience on the archival research

1) Why are we repeating the narrative that eugenics happened before WW2 and then stopped? Eugenics continued long after WW2, whether with genetically-modified babies created in 2018 or companies in the USA offering genetic tests for parents. Eugenics continues at UCL after WW2 and the Eugenics Society still exists with its Vice-President, President and one of its Trustees based at UCL in 2019.

MK: the focus for the 4-month research project was to investigate the early period, based on material available. Research is inevitably limited by the time constraints and the choice to start with the early days is that we need to find out what happened to understand the future ramifications. There were plenty of critics of Pearson's work in his time but there is no research to show the contrast between Pearson and his detractors to help understand the pertinence of Pearson's research. It is essential for scientists to revisit Pearson's work by looking at what scientists at the time picked out in their critiques.

2) It is extremely silly to draw a direct line between what happened at the time and what is happening today. In the words of Charles Darwin "Ignorance more frequently breeds confidence than does knowledge." CRISPR is being used to treat patients with genetic disorder: is that eugenics? I don't think so: genetic medicine is part of the future. This approach is painting geneticists in a negative light, and should focus on the positives.

[Questioner 1]: in 1999, the Galton Institute invited 3 hardcore scientific racists to speak. Some people in this room are still part of the society.

3) If University of London were involved in holding the funds, have they been involved in the Inquiry in any way?

IS: no. This is a UCL investigation, and the Commission is still looking into some questions about the funds. There may be cause to approach UoL after these questions are cleared.

MK: the UoL catalogue is open, so anyone can find the relevant documents.

4) At the beginning of the Inquiry, Egyptologists were mentioned. Has Petrie been dropped?

MK: No. The main tasks from the research was to divide the archive into themes. The amount of material we have in UCL Archives is staggering, with 6,000 records in the Galton Collection alone. Scope was limited by the time and money available for this initial research.

5) Was UCL at the forefront of eugenics or was there a broader existing context?

MK: Pearson was a very difficult individual, who did not want to be teaching and wanted to be left to his research. He did not want to be engaged with the Eugenics Education Society and felt the latter were amateurs who were damaging the whole cause.

6) Are there any plans or financial provisions for more research?

MK: research conducted was based in the department of Science and Technology Studies (STS). STS have extended MK's work to January, to allow research to be published and support the publication of a Finding Aid for future research on this material.

IS: Beyond January, there is no funding to continue this work. UCL should think about a larger-scale research project for around 5 years.

Subhadra Das (SD): the whole of the UCL community can and should take part in understanding the legacy of UCL. SD invited the audience to work with the Commission to think more critically.

Provost: since the Inquiry was established in late 2018, we have funded all requests made by the Commission to date.

7) It is important that Petrie is included: it provides more of a global link between UCL and the rest of the world. I would not want the blame to be shifted to UoL and stopping insight into wider reach of eugenics.

MK: The research is not about pointing the finger to UoL but identifying documents regarding UCL's early days in the UoL archives. Galton was not a member of staff at UCL: it was Pearson who was the UCL lead on eugenics.

8) The task at hand is huge and there is a risk it will not be complete in a solid way by January 2020 with recommendations based on fully-considered questions. The suggestion that Galton was used by the Nazis needs to be documented firmly, to justify why it is included in the online questionnaire.

IS: The Commission has come across evidence in the literature for the influence of Galton's theories on Hitler and will evidence any recommendations to ensure the link is made clearly between the evidence base and the recommendations.

Prof. Ijeoma Uchegbu (IU): Hitler's manifesto professes admiration for eugenicists in the US.

9) Has any progress been made with links to modern day racism?

IS: The Commission is still discussing this. There are different views on the panel and the Inquiry is progressing slowly. There will be a reflection of discussions in the report.

10) Will the bibliography and Town Hall video been made available?

IS: Yes, the Inquiry has been working towards a website. This should be live in the next month or 2.

11) In terms of historical analysis, what is not coming through is Galton's complete oeuvre, for instance Galton's contribution to the regression/correlation coefficient, meteorology, etc. There is an issue around representing Galton's total achievements.

MK: Further research is needed into this question, in terms of context and why anthropometry was successful. For instance, Galton set up the Anthropometric Laboratory at the 1884 Health Exhibition, which was very well attended. However, Douglas Galton was involved in the Exhibition committee and the laboratory was placed at the entrance to the exhibition, near the restaurant, with a lattice wall to entertain and attract visitors. Galton set other laboratories in South Kensington, Eton, Cambridge and Dublin, none of which were successful.

SD: It is also important to know about Galton's work on meteorology and fingerprinting as science developed to support the British Empire.

Prof. Tamar Garb (TG): It would be unreasonable to expect one researcher to develop a full narrative which can satisfy everyone. Work conducted has been about providing access to the archives and helping understand what resources are available at UCL and what debates are happening. The Commission aims to open up the discussion, making people aware of resources and resourcing research to the exacting standards we all hold to ensure that we can expand our understanding of UCL's history. This is the start of a wider process, as described by the Chair in opening comments.

MK: We have an immense amount of material catalogued at a very basic level in the UCL Records Office and the team want to be able to catalogue the collection so that it can be made accessible for everyone.

Prof. Tom Fearn: The history of statistics, especially in 1920-30s, is completely mixed up with the history of eugenics. Techniques created by Galton and Pearson are still used today. Since starting on the Commission, having read things Pearson wrote, I see he was a racist even by the standards of his day. I don't think those techniques are discredited by the uses originally intended but I don't want to teach in spaces named after Galton.

12) The Inquiry seems to be a self-inflicted wound by UCL: it is futile to judge science from 100 years ago. There seems to be confusion between eugenics and modern-day genetics and a deliberate conflation of politics and science to cause mischief. This is a nihilistic road being taken by UCL: it is sensible to aim to have healthy children as long as this is not enforced by an authoritarian regime.

IU: As a Commission, we make a clear distinction between the study of genetics and eugenics. Many witnesses have told of the wonderful work being done by geneticists. The Commission is not confused on this question.

Prof. Ann Phoenix (AP): Our methods have allowed us to get a full range of views on all these issues. It has been really interesting to engage with ourselves, engaging with the literature and the research undertaken by the researchers. All of the points raised in the room today are ones which the Commission had had to consider.

13) This is a great conversation happening. I hope UCL really takes this on and addresses it, rather than passing blame onto UoL.

Approach of the Commission to history - Prof. Iyiola Solanke

IS set out some possible approaches for the Commission to take in relation to history, for instance acknowledging the 'afterlife' of eugenics (*In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe, 2016), accepting the past as a foreign country where they do differently (*The Go-Between*, J. P. Hartley, 1953) or a combination of both. IS invited feedback from the audience.

Questions and comments from the audience on historical method

1) It depends on how you define the past. Things which happened in the 1990s or 2000s is not the past; these are not things we can forget.

2) Even things we talk about from 100 years ago are still endorsed by some contemporaries. Need the emphasis to come back to community, rather than exclusively an academic discussion. I think financial reparations need to be paid. The treatment of outsourced workers mirrors the classifications of Galton and Pearson: we need to change the way the community is treated. Changing the names of rooms is not the solution.

3) In terms of treating the past as a foreign country, we need to look at whether it is still having an impact today. It is also useful to understand the context, for instance with Pearson: was he twisting science to promote racism, or making assumptions based on the prevailing attitudes at the time?

4) Judge the science by today's standards to help discredit bad science from the past.

5) Regarding the separation of politics and science, recommend reading Lily Kay *The Molecular Vision of Life: Caltech, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Rise of the New Biology* (1996) on how the whole development of society is affected by choices made in science. For instance, the development of molecular biology is a result of focus in the 1930s by the Rockefeller Foundation with the long-term goal of pushing eugenics in more scientific sophisticated versions. It is nonsense to say that eugenics and medicine are totally separate. The Rockefeller Foundation's aim of promoting eugenics has been very successful. It is regrettable that there has not been a disability rights voice today.

6) The most striking thing is that departments are making decisions on the basis that disabled students should not really be at university if they cannot "handle" a course: they are choosing not to adapt buildings, and access needs are not met. This is not being addressed at UCL and being perpetuated. Medics don't develop treatments successfully if disabled people are excluded from science.

IS invited the student to talk in more detail about this.

7) What historiographical framework is being used in approaching the history?

IS: this is being developed. A full bibliography will be included in the report, including primary sources and secondary literature, setting out the different fields of literature which were referenced.

8) We are all a little bit eugenicists ourselves. For instance, in the online questionnaire, there is an option to tick "Mixed race". A lot of thought is still necessary.

9) This is an amazing piece of work. I hope the approach adopted is "both/and". It is very important to address the historiographical question.

Concluding remarks

- Prof. Iyiola Solanke

IS thanked all participants and attendees at the Town Hall meeting. IS especially thanked MK for presenting the archival research findings so clearly. IS encouraged participants to complete the online survey.