

**Imperial College Union
Union Position on Imperial History Dialogue
Union Council / 06 December 2022**

Authors: Hayley Wong – Union President

Seconders: Jason Zheng - Deputy President (Education)
Nathalie Podder – Deputy President (Welfare)
Dylan Hughes – Deputy President (Clubs & Societies)

Union Notes

1. As a result of the [History Group Report](#), which sought to “*examine the history of the College through its links to the British Empire, and to report on the current understanding and reception of the College’s legacy and heritage in the context of its present-day mission*”, the College convened the History Working Group (HWG) to explore options of future actions.
2. The History Group Report noted that:
 - a. Alfred Beit, after whom the Beit building is named, made significant donations to the College in its early years. His fortune derived principally from diamond and gold mining in South Africa, industries which were profoundly oppressive of their largely Black migrant labour force.
 - b. Thomas Huxley made significant contributions to scientific education and discovery, including being the principal defender of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Huxley was a slavery abolitionist. However, Huxley’s studies reinforced a racial hierarchy of intelligence, feeding into the dangerous and false ideology of eugenics.
3. The report recommended that the Beit Building and the Huxley Building be renamed.
4. The College undertook a dialogue process with staff, students, and alumni, with a [summary of the responses](#) published.
5. *The HWG has finished its exploration process and will be submitting a report to the University Management Board (UMB, previously known as President’s Board and Provost’s Board) on 13th December 2022, notably including the following recommendations:*
 - a. *Dual-naming the Huxley Building the ‘Abdus Salam-Thomas Huxley’ Building formally, or the ‘Salam-Huxley’ Building in conversation*
 - b. *Retain the name of the Beit Building*
 - c. *Contextualise both Huxley and Beit through the use of digital screens at their respective entrances, with content curated in collaboration with historians*
6. Abdus Salam’s family is in favour of the dual-naming proposal.
7. The UMB chose to retain the Beit name to “*provide the opportunity for innovative contextualisation options and drive further learning, discovery and continued conversations around our history.*”
8. In a [paper proposed](#) to Union Council on 8th March 2022, the Union resolved:
 - a. To mandate the Union President to publish materials condemning the College’s decision to seek joint names for the Beit and Huxley buildings.
 - b. To mandate the Union President to request that President’s Board commit to change the name of the Beit Building to instead recognise one of the aforementioned ‘undercelebrated’ individuals.
 - i. If this is not agreed by President’s Board within a reasonable timeframe, to authorise a referendum of all students on the name of the building, with options including retention of the ‘Beit’ name along with alternatives chosen by Council.

- ii. If the referendum concludes that the name ought to be changed, to require the Union no longer recognise 'Beit' as the name of the building and to use the student- selected name in all official documentation and publicity, until such a time as this name is officially recognised by the College.

Union Believes

1. That the College community may be *informed* about the historical actions, contributions and controversies of individuals without *celebrating* those individuals.
2. That the naming of a building after an individual does little to *inform* about an individual and much to *celebrate*.
3. That Alfred Beit does not deserve to be celebrated.
4. *That Thomas Huxley does not deserve to be celebrated.*
5. That double-barrelling the names of Huxley and Beit with those of BAME scientists is more offensive than either renaming the building or leaving the name as-is (with context).
6. *The contextualisation of Beit and Huxley through the use digital screens is insufficient in ensuring those individuals are not celebrated.*

Union Resolves

1. To mandate the Union President to lobby the College to rename the Beit Building.
2. To mandate the Union President to lobby the College to rename the Huxley Building.
3. To mandate the Union President to authorise a poll of all students on the renaming of the Beit Building if the University Management Board does not commit to renaming it within a reasonable timeframe.
4. To mandate the Union President to authorise a poll of all students on the renaming of the Huxley Building if the University Management Board does not commit to renaming it within a reasonable timeframe.
5. If the polls conclude that the names ought to be changed, to mandate the Union President to lobby the College to commission further research by historians into alternative naming options for Beit.