

# Open Letter to Clare College, Cambridge from Alumni: Discussions surrounding the Honorary Fellowship and Issues in Science following recent comments by Sir Tim Hunt

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April 17, 2023

## **Abstract**

On 8th June 2015, Sir Tim Hunt made a comment in reference to women in science which has generated much debate. In response to this a group of 11 alumni of Clare College, Cambridge, at which Tim Hunt is a member of the Honorary Fellowship, sent this letter to the College on 23rd June 2015.



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## ABSTRACT

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Sir Tim Hunt made a comment in reference to women in science which has generated much debate. In response to this a group of 11 alumni of Clare College, Cambridge, at which Tim Hunt is a member of the Honorary Fellowship, sent this letter to the College on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015.

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### DATE RECEIVED:

June 23, 2015

### DOI:

10.15200/winn.143506.65033

### ARCHIVED:

June 23, 2015

### KEYWORDS:

Nobel, Tim Hunt, sexism, policy

### CITATION:

Gary S. McDowell, Open Letter to Clare College, Cambridge from Alumni: Discussions surrounding the Honorary Fellowship and Issues in Science following recent comments by Sir Tim Hunt, *The Winnower* 2:e143506.65033, 2015, DOI: [10.15200/winn.143506.65033](https://doi.org/10.15200/winn.143506.65033)

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To Whom It May Concern:

As alumni of Clare College, we are concerned that public perceptions of Clare may be tainted by a lack of discussion about the membership of the Honorary Fellowship of the college. This is in light of recent comments made by Tim Hunt, and the comparison that is being drawn with many comments made by James Watson in the past, both being Honorary Fellows of Clare. As many of us studied in the sciences whilst at Clare, or are early career researchers, it is disappointing that comments such as these that set back progress in equality and diversity in science are being made by people also representing our alma mater. In selecting a college to study Natural Sciences, or pursue a research degree, potential students may feel that the Honorary Fellowship reflects the ethos of the College and be disinclined to apply.

We do not wish to compel College to remove them from the Fellowship but to promote a free and open discussion amongst all members of the College about what effect comments such as these are having on public perceptions of science, and the College; whether College should have a role in speaking out against views the Honorary Fellows express, as they are College Representatives appointed by Governing Body; and whether the ethos of Clare is accurately reflected by the Honorary Fellows that have been selected.

UCL took the swift decision to force Tim Hunt's resignation, without a conversation about the issue, which has generated much discussion. Whilst this is not the particular action we are urging, if Clare does not discuss whether the inclusion of James Watson and Tim Hunt amongst the Honorary Fellowship is meant to reflect the views of the College, or merely thanks them for contributions to the college, prospective students and the public at large will be free to draw their own conclusions about what message Clare is sending and we believe this will be to the detriment of Clare. We also feel that this will negatively affect our own perceptions on our experiences at Clare.

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Our hope is that Clare will use this as an opportunity for an open, academic discussion about what it means to be associated with Clare. We would like to assist with how that discussion could take place as part of the community at Clare.

With best wishes,

We the undersigned, alumni of Clare College.