

Top university under fire over its conferences on 'eugenics'

Rosemary Bennett Education Editor

One of Britain's most liberal universities has learnt that it has played host to a conference for controversial academics and experts for three years without knowing it.

University College London has been the venue for the London Conference on Intelligence, a secretive, invitation-only event on "empirical studies of intelligence, personality and behaviour".

It has been held at the university every year since 2015 without the authorities being notified, in a breach of its own rules. This year's conference, scheduled for May, has been suspended while UCL investigates.

The conferences have hosted speakers presenting work that claims racial mixing has a negative effect on population "quality", and that "skin brightness" is a factor in global development.

The brochure for the 2016 event bore an image of the 19th century eugenicist Edward Thorndike on its cover and contained his words: "Selective breeding can alter man's capacity to learn, to keep sane, to cherish justice or to be happy." Past speakers have included Emil Kirkegaard, who presented research on "differential immigrant group performance".

Richard Lynn, emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Ulster, has spoken. He has written widely about eugenics and dysgenics, the perpetuation of defective or disadvantageous genes, and racial differences in intelligence. In *Race Difference in Intelligence: An Evolutionary Analysis*, his research placed northeast Asians at the top of a global table of racial IQs.

David Becker and Heiner Rindermann, from the Chemnitz University of Technology in Germany, presented a paper on why some nations are "brighter than others".

However *London Student*, a cam-

paigning newspaper, called the event a "eugenics conference" dominated by "a secretive group of white supremacists" after it was reported by *Private Eye*, the satirical magazine.

The conference has been hosted by James Thompson, a senior honorary lecturer at UCL who has published widely on the nature of intelligence. He has commented in the past on the controversy that now surrounds the measurement and discussion of IQ.

Dr Thompson declined to comment to *The Times*, but he defended the content of the conference to *Private Eye*. "No idea is shocking. An idea is only something that you investigate whether it is true or not," he said.

He strongly denied that the event promoted "eugenics", saying that the "bulk of research" focused on intelligence and whether or not it is heritable.

Toby Young, the free schools campaigner who stood down from the board of the Office for Students this week after a row over his past tweets and other writings, attended last year's conference, but did not speak.

Listening to ideas did not imply approval, he said. "That's the kind of reasoning that leads to people being no-platformed on universities campuses."

UCL said that it was investigating a potential breach of the room booking process, during which events are assessed. "The university was not informed in advance about the speakers and content of the conference series, as it should have been for the event to be allowed," a spokesman said. "The conferences were booked and paid for as an external event ... They were therefore not approved or endorsed by UCL. We are an institution that is committed to free speech but also to combating racism and sexism in all forms."

He added that the university authorities would speak to Dr Thompson "seeking an explanation".