

# Gazette supplement



# Legislative Proposal and proposed amendments on Congregation Regulations 3 of 2022 on the Conduct of Ceremonies in Congregation, and certain other Ceremonies

A meeting of Congregation took place on 29 April with regard to a legislative proposal and a proposed amendment to the proposal on Congregation Regulations 3 of 2022. For the full text of the legislative proposal, see [Gazette No 5451, 20 March 2025, p415](#), and for the proposed amendment, see [Gazette No 5453, 24 April 2025, p446](#).

The first three items of business are voting on a resolution authorising the allocation of space: in the Stephen A Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, the Life and Mind Building and the Gibson building, respectively. No notice of opposition has been received to any of these three resolutions; I therefore declare these resolutions carried.

2 notices of opposition to the Legislative Proposal have been received and 1 proposed amendment.

We will accommodate all pre-arranged speakers, and try to give members of Congregation an opportunity to speak from the floor.

When asked, please would speakers come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving their name and college or department? Speakers are asked not to speak for more than 4 minutes, and to confine their remarks to themes relevant to the proposal. The anti-loquitor device will indicate a speaker's final minute with an amber light, and then turn red at the end of that minute. At this point speakers should conclude their remarks; otherwise I shall ask speakers to return to their seats.

At the conclusion of speeches, a vote will be called on the proposed amendment. Members will be invited to place their voting papers in a ballot box at one of the exits to the theatre. Each member of Congregation will have one vote. A member may not leave a completed voting paper for another member: only a member's personal voting paper will be accepted. Any member who cannot stay until I call the vote will not be able to vote.

If the proposed amendment is rejected, there will be a vote on the original legislative proposal; if the proposed amendment is carried, there will be a vote on the amended legislative proposal.

All members of Congregation present should have 3 voting papers; extracts of the *Gazette* including the proposed amendment and a copy of the legislative proposal annotated to show the proposed amendment, are also available in the theatre.

I shall first call Gill Aitken, Registrar, to move the proposal and Jackie Hoyle, Director of the Student Registry, to second it.

I shall then call on Professor Paul Elbourne and Dr Nicolai Sinai to move their notices of the opposition.

Finally, I shall call upon Dr Tristan Franklins to move the proposed amendment and Dr Jonathan Katz to second it.

Speeches will be invited in support of or opposition to the proposed amendment as time permits and then Dr Franklins will be given the opportunity to respond.

I call on Gill Aitken, Registrar, to move the Legislative Proposal.

**Gill Aitken**, Registrar,

I am Gill Aitken, the Registrar and Secretary to Congregation, and I am proposing, on behalf of Council, some changes to the degree ceremony script.

The formula underpinning the University's degree script (which is written in Latin) with respect to the record of students' sex is derived from a student record system, SITS. Since September 2023, SITS has been updated to meet external statutory reporting requirements and to incorporate amended wording in the national undergraduate admissions dataset (UCAS). Graduate application questions have also been amended to ensure the same approach across all records. Therefore, students may now confirm their sex as 'female', 'male' or 'other'. As well as reflecting the preferences of graduands the changes make the preparation of graduation scripts easier and will result in fewer errors of nomenclature. These benefits will streamline the work of the Degree Conferral team and those speaking the scripts at ceremonies.

The current degree ceremony text uses the 2 grammatical genders that Latin can properly use of people. The proposed changes to the formulae remove reference to conspicuously gendered terms which will enable us to:

1. represent all students equally at the ceremony irrespective of their gender;
2. remove uncertainty for those presenting at ceremonies – there will be a significant reduction in the variation of the formulae that Deans of Degrees need to use, as there will simply be singular and plural variants for each degree; this will make it easier for Deans and University Officers at ceremonies; and
3. reduce workloads within the supporting office where last-minute changes to the graduand attendee list require updates to the gender for multiple paper documents needed in the ceremonies. This is especially difficult to manage when several degree days are being managed simultaneously.

The changes are not affected by the recent Supreme Court judgment regarding the nature of sex and gender, because they are about ways of addressing graduands generally.

The proposed change has been several years in the design with careful thought given to change and consultation. The changes to the scripts used in ceremonies reflect the requirements of UCAS and HESA as they have changed in recent years. The legislative changes are proposed following consultation over the last 2 years with the primary ceremony stakeholders within colleges (namely the Deans of Degrees), the Student Union and the Proctors' Office in both the 23/24 and the 24/25 terms of office. There has been consistent support for the idea that the Latin should be amended to address all genders using the same language. The recommendation and proposed new script were considered and approved by the Degree Ceremony Advisory Group which has representation from colleges through the Deans of Degrees, from the VC and Proctors' Offices, and from central supporting teams. It makes recommendations to the VC and the Proctors. It was through this route that the proposed changes were brought to the General Purposes Committee and to Council.

Dr Jonathan Katz, the Public Orator, and Dr Tristan Franklins, a member of the Deans of Degrees Steering Committee and Lector in the Faculty of Classics, were consulted and then drafted the changes to the Latin script, making as few changes as possible while ensuring consistency throughout the various formulae prescribed in this set of regulations.

Since the proposal was Gazetted on 20 March 2025 some members of Congregation have suggested an amendment to the proposed Latin to offer a more felicitous form of words within the script. These amendments have been considered and incorporated

into a revised version which is available here today for you to consider. Thank you.

**Professor Patrick Grant**

I call on Jackie Hoyle, Director of the Student Registry, to second the Legislative Proposal.

**Jackie Hoyle**, Deputy Academic Registrar for Education Services

I am Jackie Hoyle, and I'm actually Deputy Academic Registrar for Education Services, and I am here to second the proposal because the Student Record and Degree Ceremony Office activities fall within my remit.

I concur with the points made by the Registrar in the proposal, and can confirm that changes to statutory reporting requirements required us to make changes to the student record, and as a result, to rethink how we manage some of our processes, including the production of the degree ceremony script.

The successful operation of our degree days is achieved through extensive collaboration between a number of central teams, the Deans of Degrees, college administrators, and the Proctors' and VC's Offices. We are collectively responsible for the smooth running of degree days, and work together to identify improvements and address challenges. Within this context, the issue that arose from the change in the student record-keeping was flagged by the Degree Conferrals Office, and by working with those who are most affected by the script (the Deans of Degrees and the Proctors from the 2023/24 office), it became clear that the removal of the conspicuously gendered terms would not only address the student record issue, but would also make the task of presenting at ceremonies much easier, since a simplified text would be available.

I know the Deans of Degrees to be committed guardians of the Degree Ceremony, defending the integrity of its content and choreography. Without the support of the Deans of Degrees Steering Group – informed by wider discussions with the conclave of Deans of Degrees – these proposed changes would simply not have progressed. Having garnered decanal support, these changes were brought to the General Purposes Committee and to Council, and have subsequently come before Congregation. Thank you.

**Professor Patrick Grant**

I call on Nicolai Sinai to move his opposition.

**Professor Nicolai Sinai**

Thank you. Nicolai Sinai, Pembroke College.

An important part of the proposed changes consists in editing out demonstratives and possessive pronouns. Thus, instead of the existing *praesento vobis hunc meum scholarem*, 'I present to you this my student', the

proposal before us has *praesento vobis scholarem ... hic adstantem*, 'I present to you the student standing here'. As a colleague of mine has observed, this has the regrettable effect of eliminating students' affiliation with their colleges. Undergraduates are not isolated individuals but rather have studied and lived within collegiate communities. The purging of the possessive removes something essential about Oxford.

The rationale behind the edit must be that Latin demonstratives and possessive pronouns take different masculine and feminine forms; and since the neuter cannot be used to refer to a person, these expressions are understood to presuppose binary sex. Now, the way in which grammatical gender in Latin relates to biological sex is complicated. But Latin, like many other languages and indeed like UK passports, does involve a presumption that by and large humans can be subdivided into male and female.

Despite the fact that the general presumption of sexual binarity is deeply ingrained in many languages, there are ongoing attempts to transcend this (for example, in contemporary German). I am not here today to express a view on such modern linguistic re-engineering. But Latin, for one, is clearly not a living language any more with a potential for organic development. So I think, if the University wants to lend its proceedings gravitas by conducting them in an ancient tongue, then it seems to me that it would be honest to accept this ancient language for what it is – which is to say, to accept that its demonstratives and possessive pronouns are gendered in a way that English demonstratives and possessive pronouns are not. Some may view this as archaic and outdated, but surely the point of conducting ceremonies in a language other than the vernacular is precisely that this is archaic. The project of drafting a non-binary Latin text for degree ceremonies therefore strikes me as a futile exercise in having one's cake and eating it: we simultaneously want to present ourselves as faithfully re-enacting hoary rituals and as fully in sync with progressive values. But if we feel that demonstratives presupposing sexual binarity are simply intolerable, I think we should be honest enough simply to drop Latin – rather than seeking to cancel something as linguistically fundamental as demonstratives and possessives. Some newspapers will no doubt gratefully mock us in either case.

But I am not sure that there is a widespread feeling of intolerability among the student body. Rather, I would assume that there is an appreciation that Latin ceremonies are charming linguistic cosplay that really needs to be taken with quite a few pinches of salt. After all, we routinely declaim Latin graces invoking God and our Lord Jesus Christ to an audience including many non-Christians, agnostics, and atheists. Similarly, we have female heads of house who take the title of "Master", and we award Bachelors', Masters', and

Doctors' degrees to students who identify as female and as non-binary (rather than, say, the degree of a *Magistra Artium* or whatever its non-binary equivalent would be). Such practices are open to the same principled objections that underpin the revisions to the degree ceremony. For why should a female or a non-binary person accept the conferral of a male-connoted status? So if this proposal were to pass, then I think we must tread the path of consistency and strip all of this away. We certainly ought to come up with gender-neutral degree titles in Latin, despite what is argued in the Notice of Amendment.

To conclude: we are wearing Latin like a ceremonial gown. It is a cherished symbol, but it really does not have to fulfil the same requirements as our everyday workplace attire. Thank you.

#### Professor Patrick Grant

I call on Paul Elbourne to move his opposition.

#### Professor Paul Elbourne

Thank you. Paul Elbourne, Magdalen College. Following on from the comments of Professor Sinai, some of which dealt with broad principles, I propose to change the focus slightly and examine some of the details of the original proposal.

First, the new text frequently uses the innovatory phrase *hic adstantem* (or, in the plural, *hic adstantes*) to describe participants in the relevant ceremonies. The phrase occurs no less than 27 times, in fact, by my count. This phrase means 'standing here'. According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the verb *adsto* has only the following senses when applied to human beings: 'stand by', 'stand waiting', 'stand still', 'stand up', and 'help'. The last sense being clearly not relevant. So we obtain 'standing here' for the present participle of this verb combined with *hic* (which means 'here'). I labour this point because this language seems to be exclusionary with regard to wheelchair users, who will presumably not be standing during the relevant ceremonies. This point alone, I think, should be enough to make everyone who might otherwise be in sympathy with the new text resolve to oppose it. People otherwise in sympathy with the new text presumably care enough about inclusive language that they wish to make sure our Latin formulas are inclusive with regard to non-binary people, this being the motivation set out in the *Gazette* on 20 March; I cannot imagine that any such person would be prepared to vote in favour of language that was so clearly exclusionary with regard to another minority group. If I might be permitted to look ahead very briefly, I think you'll find that the same issue will affect the amended text too.

My second point is that the new formulas consistently strip out the opening salutations by which groups of graduands are addressed: *domini*, *doctores*, *magistri*, and

so on. These are all removed at the start of the original formulas. For those of you whose Latin is rusty, I should clarify that *magister* is someone with a master's degree; *doctor* is someone with a doctoral degree. Nevertheless, some of these very same words are retained in the modified text to describe these very same people in other parts of the formulas. For example, in 3.27 we have *praesento vobis Magistrum in artibus* ('I present to you a Master of Arts') and *praesento vobis Doctorem in Litteris* ('I present to you a Doctor of Letters') among many other examples: phrases of this kind are present in at least 17 sections or subsections of the new text. I don't see how it makes sense to describe non-binary people as *Magistrum* or *Doctorem* if it is not permissible to address them as *Magistri* or *Doctores*. The words of course are grammatically masculine in all these cases.

A closely related point is that there are other examples of words with a masculine gender, used to describe participants in the ceremonies, which are left in the text. The most prominent example, perhaps, is the opening formula *Insignissime Vice-Cancellarie*, 'most-distinguished Vice-Chancellor', which uses a clearly masculine adjective (*insignissime*, meaning 'most distinguished') to address the Vice-Chancellor. This occurs at least 27 times in the proposed text. We could in future have a non-binary Vice-Chancellor. We might even, indeed, have a female one. The moral to draw, I think, is that stripping our formulas of all relevant occurrences of words with masculine gender would be a huge exercise and would mangle them much more than currently seems to be anticipated.

Lastly, I suspect that it will be impossible to revise these formulas in such a way as to remove the offending words *magister* and *doctor*, since it is necessary to use these words to talk about masters' degrees and doctoral degrees. The standard formula for awarding someone a DPhil, for example, asks, with regard to that person, *ut admittatur ad gradum Doctoris in Philosophia*, 'that they be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy'. As long as we go on awarding masters' degrees and doctoral degrees and holding our ceremonies in Latin (and, to be clear, I'm not recommending that we change these things!), I think we will have to continue using these words. Thank you.

#### Professor Patrick Grant

I call on Tristan Franklins to move the proposed amendment.

#### Dr Tristan Franklins

Dr Tristan Franklins, Wolfson. Vice-Chancellor, Proctors, colleagues – being a Latinist with ceremonial inclinations at the University of Oxford can, it seems, result in one being in some unexpected situations. Before turning to the proposed amendment, it may be helpful to set out how the Latin text of the legislative proposal was reached. Toward the close of the



procuratorial year 2023–24 during which I was a Pro-Proctor, I found myself in the right place at the wrong time – or the wrong place at the right time, or some such formulation – and was asked, as a Latinist familiar with the Degree Day ceremonial from the perspective of a Dean of Degrees and of a University Officer, to have a go at redrafting Congregation Regulations 3 of 2002 with a view to removing words that displayed their grammatical gender in their form; this was, as the Registrar has noted, to ensure compliance with external requirements. In undertaking this task, I was fortunate to have as a collocutor my excellent colleague, the Public Orator, as well as a number of other Latinists and decanal colleagues.

My intention was to make as few changes as possible to our much-beloved ceremonial language and, fortunately, the requisite outcome – *pace* the opposition – has achieved this with minimal adjustments and remains well within the bounds of acceptable Latin usage. The difficulty faced in this particular undertaking is that every noun, adjective, and pronoun has a grammatical gender in Latin, so some considerable care and thought were expended on the approach to be taken to this labyrinthine task: *facilis descensus Auerno, sed hoc opus, hic labor est*. In essence, the proposed changes rely on the fact that, though grammatical gender permeates the Latin language, not all words display their grammatical gender in the form they take, that is to say that in these instances the grammatical masculine and feminine are indistinguishable in appearance; the word *scholaris* – already used throughout the formulae – is one such word. Forms of this sort can thus be used of any individual regardless of gender, and have been introduced into the formulae in the handful of necessary places.

This amendment proposes to reinstate a form of salutations used by the Vice-Chancellor and Proctors. Though attempts had been made to maintain the salutations in earlier drafts of the legislative proposal, as outlined in the text of the amendment, these met with resistance over the word *Dominus* ('Sir') which displays its grammatical gender and has to refer to an individual rather than being taken as referring to a status – the latter is the case with *Doctor*, *Magister*, and *Baccalaureus*. (Hence the legislative proposal and amendment have *Doctor*, *Magister*, and *Baccalaureus* not inflected by grammatical gender; this is the same as in English.) Following the Gazetting of the legislative proposal, it became clear to Dr Katz and to me that many shared our dissatisfaction with the removal of the salutations and, in the light of this, we applied ourselves again and have proposed this amendment to restore them. We propose to replace the tricky word *Dominus* with *Sodalis*, a term meaning 'member' or 'fellow' of a particular body; it is a noun of common grammatical gender that has the same forms regardless of the gender of the individual to whom it refers. This allows for the

restoration of the salutations that connote the respect shown by University Officers to graduands in the course of the ceremony.

As an addendum, a brief word on the Deans' formulae of presentation may be helpful here. In the legislative proposal, these have had the words *hunc meum* removed and *hic adstantem* added; to be quite explicitly clear, only 2 words out of about 24 are replaced so as to maintain the deictic function ('this graduand of mine' becomes 'the graduand here present') and conspicuousness of grammatical gender is thus removed. This minor change has the happy side-effect of simplifying the formulae used by Deans, as there will only be singular and plural versions without gender having to be taken into account in the course of ceremonies, thus making it much simpler for those less familiar with Latin.

I urge the Regent Doctors and Masters of this Venerable House to vote in favour of the legislative proposal and of this amendment. Thank you.

#### Professor Patrick Grant

I call on Jonathan Katz to second the proposed amendment.

#### Dr Jonathan Katz

Collegae, Sodales, I am Jonathan Katz, the University's Public Orator. Among my regular duties I am charged with keeping an eye on the Latin used in the University's formal ceremonies. Such Latin usage is far from static. New formulae have been needed frequently as the functions of the University adapted to changes such, for example, as the eventual, somewhat overdue, awarding of degrees to women graduates. I can say truthfully that every year since I was elected to this office in 2016 I have had to introduce new material and often revise the old, providing Latin forms of personal names, titles and affiliations, translating the names of new degrees, and so on. It has therefore not been a complete surprise to me that compliance with new requirements has demanded a fresh look at the Latin salutations and forms of address and supplication at our degree ceremonies. Nevertheless, I thank the Registrar for the clarity of her explanation of exactly where these requirements have come from; the explanation is an important corrective to some misconceptions that have found their way into the press, and not the press alone.

I take this opportunity to state my admiration for Dr Franklin's neat proposals. It is true that he and I have been in regular discussion about them, but the major part of the work was his. In my own capacity I have approved the changes in the Latin, and I am particularly happy with those proposed in the amendment under discussion. The language departs only minimally from what we all – well, most of us, I dare hope – know and respect. The formulae have in my view retained what

elegance there was before, and yet have been deftly given a new convenient simplicity, removing some anxiety from the duties of our Deans of Degrees. No violence has been done to our Latin; it is in my judgment correct, and this view is shared by senior professional classicists in the University.

The case rests itself. I ask you to support the amended proposal, which is well in tune with our tradition, is easy to adopt, and preserves, or indeed strengthens, our compliance with changing rules and, I believe more importantly, our compliance with good, old-fashioned, courtesy to our graduands regardless of gender – or perhaps I should rather say, regarding gender in a newly sensitive, and at the same time efficient, way.

Thank you.

**Professor Patrick Grant**

I have had an indication that Paul Elbourne and Nicolai Sinai might wish to speak again at this point. I invite you to do so now.

**Professor Paul Elbourne**

Thank you very much. I just have a very brief addition to make. I still take it that the difficulties with wording, including the unfortunate fact that the new formulas seem to be discriminatory with regard to another minority group, still constitute a great problem for not only the original text, but also the the amended text; the amendment did not remove or alter the phrase *hic adstantem* or the phrase *hic adstantes*. So the problem that I outlined in my first speech, still remains in the amendment. However, I do support the restoration of the initial salutations in the amendment. I would greatly prefer the amended text to pass as compared to the original legislative proposal, and therefore, just in case you are all so mired in error as to vote for change in the final vote that we have here today, I would support the amendment, because I would much prefer that to the original text. Thank you very much.

**Professor Patrick Grant**

We can accommodate up to one or two more short speeches before proceeding to the first vote at 3pm, if anyone on the floor would like to offer a view, please come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving your name and college or department.

Tristan, would you like to make a response?

I now call the vote on the proposed amendment to the Legislative Proposal. I ask the Proctors and the Pro-Proctors to move to the voting stations at each of the exits to the theatre. When they reach their positions, I shall invite members of Congregation to cast their votes. The correct voting paper is marked with a number '1'.

I must remind you that only members of Congregation are entitled to vote. Having completed their voting papers, those seated on the floor and the semi-circle should leave via the south exit. Those seated in the lower galleries should leave via the east and west exits. In order to ensure the voting process is completed as quickly as possible, please leave the theatre swiftly and return promptly when the doors are reopened.

Members of Congregation should place their voting papers in the ballot boxes under the direction of the voting officers. Any members of Congregation wishing to vote who have not received voting papers may collect them from one of the stewards immediately inside each exit.

When invited, members may return to their seats to await the results of the vote, which is expected to take about 20 minutes.

I now ask members of Congregation wishing to vote to do so using their voting papers by the exit previously pointed out to them.

...

I now invite you to take your seats for the announcement of the vote on the proposed amendment to the Legislative Proposal.

There voted for the amendment: 24. There voted against the amendment: 4. The amendment is accordingly carried.

Since the amendment was carried, Congregation is now asked to vote on the amended Legislative Proposal, using voting paper 3 using the same process as for the first vote.'

Before we proceed to the vote, I have had an indication that Paul Elbourne and Nicolai Sinai might wish to speak. I invite you to do so now.

**Professor Nicolai Sinai**

Yes, so very briefly, I do like the amendment much, much better, so I could certainly live with that. I would still maybe raise 2 questions. First, the amendment, as explained in the accompanying notice, does seem to be based on the assumption that somehow status words are okay to be masculine and others aren't. And that, to me, seems an arbitrary line to draw: that *magister* can remain in the masculine for everyone because it's a status word and other expressions can't. It seems to me that whatever we do, we will need to draw an arbitrary line somewhere. That was kind of the point of my initial argument, and I just don't think there's really a satisfactory way out of that. But if that is the case, then why not reconcile ourselves to the fact that that arbitrary line might be drawn basically with the present

text or with an earlier proposal that was circulated, but for some reason never made it to this House?

A second remark: there were allusions, references to the need to comply with new external requirements. I mean, obviously I cannot judge their nature because I'm not on any of the bodies that have discussed this in some depth, I'm sure. But it seems to me that that argument can shade into basically just the convenience of administrative streamlining. And I'm worried that we are not very clear about the nature of these external requirements as they are. I mean, as long as this country issues basically binary passports, I cannot imagine that by using the formulations *hunc meum scholarem* and *hanc meam scholarem* we would be committing a gross violation of the Equality Act. So the external requirements can't be of that nature. And if they are, then maybe somebody else could evidence that. Thank you.

**Professor Patrick Grant**

We can accommodate up to 1 or 2 more short speeches before proceeding to the second vote; if anyone on the floor would like to offer a view, please come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving your name and college or department.

I now call the second vote and ask the Proctors and the Pro-Proctors to move to the voting stations at each of the exits to the theatre. When they reach their positions, I shall invite members of Congregation to cast their votes.

I now ask members of Congregation wishing to vote to do so using their voting papers by the exit used in the first vote.

...

I now invite you to take your seats for the announcement of the second vote.

There voted for the amended Legislative Proposal: 22.  
There voted against the amended Legislative Proposal: 6.

The amended Legislative Proposal is accordingly carried.

That concludes the meeting of Congregation; thank you you for your attendance today.

