Oxford University Academics Call on Home Office to Scrap Plans to Reopen Campsfield Detention Centre

Over 80 academics and student bodies at Oxford University have signed an open letter to the government to demand that it rethink plans to reopen Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre near Kidlington in mid-2024.

The letter was written 'to oppose the reopening of Campsfield House and to encourage the government to consider viable alternatives to immigration detention.'

The letter has been signed by the heads of three Oxford colleges, the Student Union, and prominent academics including Prof. Amia Srinivasan, Prof. Timothy Garton Ash, and Prof. Alex Betts.

Staff and students will gather at 1:00 pm this Friday, June 16th outside the Radcliffe Camera, an iconic Oxford landmark, to promote the open letter and object to Campsfield reopening.

-ENDS-

For more information, interviews, or to attend the event, contact:
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Full text of the open letter:

As academic staff and representatives of student bodies at the University of Oxford, we wish to express our concern over your government’s plans to reopen Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre. We were pleased to see Campsfield House close its doors in 2018. While it was open, the centre saw hunger strikes, self-harm, and the tragic suicides of 19-year-old Ramazan Komluca in 2005 and Ianos Dragutan in 2011.

Empirical evidence shows that immigration detention has immediate and long-term negative consequences on people’s medical and mental health. The Conservative government previously acknowledged this evidence and committed to detain fewer people under immigration law for shorter periods and to pursue alternatives to detention. Reopening Campsfield means turning our backs on this evidence. Your government has not justified this recent about-turn in detention policy.

Detention is meant to be used prior to removal, yet 86% of people leaving detention in 2021 were
released on bail, and most made successful claims for asylum or other forms of humanitarian protection. Individuals can be detained without trial, without proper judicial oversight and with little chance of bail. The UK continues to be the only country in Europe without a statutory upper time limit on detention. Vulnerable people who should not be detained, including survivors of torture, trafficking and gender- and sexuality-based violence are routinely held in detention. There are multiple reports of abuse and mistreatment at existing removal sites.

The site plans for Campsfield House represent a significant expansion of the facility, yet levels of distress are higher in larger and more securitised IRCs, where the criminalisation of detainees is most stark. Similar plans to expand Campsfield House in 2015 were withdrawn following broad opposition from the public and the sitting Conservative MP.

The government is planning on spending £227 million on re-opening Campsfield. Choosing to spend taxpayers’ money on expanding the immigration detention estate during a cost-of-living crisis is a poor use of public resources. We believe this money would be better spent reducing the asylum processing backlog of over 160,000 cases and helping refugees rebuild their lives in the UK. Outsourcing the management of detention centres to profit-making private companies limits transparency around the humane treatment of detainees.

When Campsfield House opened in 1994, academics at Oxford University put their names to an open letter similar to this. Twenty years later, in 2014, our colleagues chose to write a further letter. A decade on, Britain continues to pursue the same punitive models that have failed to respect the human dignity of vulnerable people for over 30 years. It is long past time to reform our system.

We join local voices, including Oxford West and Abingdon MP Layla Moran, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and the Coalition to Keep Campsfield Closed, to oppose the reopening of Campsfield House and to encourage the government to consider viable alternatives to immigration detention.