QUIZ QUARRELS

This isn’t the first time University Challenge has come in for criticism

RULE BREAKERS
In 2009, Corpus Christi College, Oxford – captained by the incredible “intellectual blitzkrieg” Gail Trimble – were stripped of their title after one of the team turned out not to actually be a student. In an investigation conducted by the BBC and programme producer Granada, it was found that Trimble’s Corpus Christi team-mate Sam Kay had graduated in June 2008 and was working at accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers while he took part in the latter stages of the competition. To retain the integrity of the programme, the 2009 trophy was handed to the runners-up, Manchester University.

Kay apologised, but said he believed he was still eligible for the contest as he had been a student when filming had begun. It was the first time this had happened in the quiz show’s history, and a surprising end for Trimble, who had scored more points than her three team-mates combined in the run-up to the final.

GENDER ROW
In 2016 the University of Reading student union voted to boycott University Challenge following complaints over “misogynistic and sexist remarks” they say were made by host Jeremy Paxman to members of their team.

It wasn’t the first time the programme had courted controversy over alleged sexism: all-male teams and finals have faced criticism, with producers appealing to universities for more diverse teams, while female contestants have spoken of online abuse and objectification after being on the show.

Former contestants have also suggested that young women think twice about applying because of concerns that stories about them might eclipse their professional accomplishments.

Hannah Rose Woods (right), captain of the Peterhouse College, Cambridge, team that won the 2016 series, told Radio Times: “I worried about how taking part in the programme might impact my career when Google searches started returning hundreds of articles about my appearance, and random marriage proposals I’d received from strangers, instead of my academic research.”

KASIA DELGADO