

BRITISH POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE NEW  
MILLENNIUM

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## **British Political Science in the New Millennium**

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### **1 Introduction**

The onset of the 21st century finds British political science in rude health. The number of students following courses in politics remains at a high level; teaching quality has been assessed and found to be to of excellent quality; there continue to be large numbers of doctoral students, both full and part time, including significant numbers of overseas students, and in research terms British political science stands second only to that produced in the United States. Its professional body, the United Kingdom Political Studies Association, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2000, continues to recruit record numbers of political scientists and provides a wide range of services to them, be it in terms of the annual conference, journals produced and supplied as part of members' services, support for specialist groups and doctoral students, as well as travel grants for individuals attending international conferences.

British political science has faced and overcome challenges in terms of financial cutbacks in higher education in the 1980s, the introduction of research assessment later in the same decade, and teaching quality assessment at the turn of the millennium. Today it awaits the impact of the introduction in Britain of top up fees and its consequences for student recruitment to the discipline and a new round of research assessment in 2007, as well as challenges posed by developments within the European Higher Education Area.

#### **1.1 Historical background**

Politics has been studied as a discipline from the late 19th century onwards. Politics in some form or other has been taught at Oxford since the late 19th

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century. Teaching and research were further widened with the creation of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 1895. However, the first Professor of Political Science, Graham Wallas, was not appointed until 1914, though Sidney Webb (one of the School's founders) was appointed Professor of Public Administration in 1912, and the influential constitutional lawyer, A. V. Dicey, lectured from 1896. The spread of the discipline over the first half of the next century was relatively slow, with few universities establishing chairs in the discipline, and it was not until after the Second World War that politics was studied more widely at British universities. Until then, the dominant figure in the profession was Harold Laski, professor at LSE. The creation of Nuffield College at Oxford provided a further stimulus to the growth of the discipline, where the Warden, D N Chester, set about establishing a strong group of academics in the field, including David Butler, together with a growing number of graduate students. In 1949 the Universities of Manchester and Liverpool appointed W. J. M. (Bill) Mackenzie and Wilfrid Harrison to first chairs in politics, and these three were to dominate much of the discipline for the next twenty years, each establishing different dynasties of their own. But it would be true to say that none of the three produced a school of thought – each in his own way was extremely catholic, more interested in stimulating students and colleagues into opening up new areas of work and trying new ideas, though always insisting on a high degree of academic rigour in the work. Thus it was that the UK Political *Studies* Association was established in 1949, and the inaugural meeting was held in March 1950 which established both an annual meeting at which papers were discussed amongst the small numbers of practising political scientists and a quarterly journal, *Political Studies*, available to members as part of their subscription. Membership was only open to those academics teaching politics in universities. Today that qualification has been widened so that anyone interested in the study of politics may join. It is important to note the use of the word *Studies* in the Association's title. Its founding fathers rejected the American idea of politics as a science, preferring to consider the study of politics more as an art than as a science. The distinction was important at the time and persisted into the late 1960s, contributing in part to the delay in introducing behavioural and quantitative approaches to the discipline in the UK, although British political science has always had a strong focus on political thought and institutions. As Jack Hayward (1996) noted, American behaviourism was strongly resisted in the middle of the last century, and even today most departments would be known as Departments of Politics or Government as distinct to Departments of Political Science. Herein lies something of the distinctiveness of a British approach to the study of political science, one that resists the wholesale importation of orthodoxies into the discipline, be it 1950s behaviouralism or 1990s rational choice. Yet, at the same time, there is not attempt to defend a *nation*

*state* standpoint. British political science is characterised by eclecticism and a willingness to adapt and change in order to improve.

By the early 1960s, politics was being taught in most of the universities and university colleges then in existence. But the real expansion of teaching and research in politics was to come later in that decade, particularly with the creation of some dozen new universities in the mid-1960s, followed shortly after by the creation of the polytechnics – institutions supposedly teaching more applied disciplines, which included public administration. It was in this period that the first professors took up their posts in institutions such as Essex, Strathclyde, Sussex and Warwick, all institutions that have subsequently become well known as strong centres for the study of politics in the UK. Essex was particularly important in terms of the international development of British political science, since it acted (and still does) as the administrative centre for the newly created ECPR and also hosted an international Summer School. The result was that British universities came to join ECPR in large numbers, whilst many of their political science graduates also attended the Summer School, meeting others from many other European institutions, and as a result forming networks which provided an important subsequent basis for international cooperation in teaching and research.

## 1.2 Teaching

Today, politics is taught in over 90 higher education institutions in Britain. Mainly it is taught as a single subject, but it is mainly taught jointly with another subject, such as history, a language or another social science. Politics may also be taught as part of other specialised programmes such as European or American studies. Apart from a brief period in the 1980s (when funding cutbacks severely affected the social sciences), politics has always a popular choice amongst students. Estimates suggest that around 3,000 students follow single honours degree programmes and perhaps ten times that number following joint ones. Most B.A. programmes are of three years duration, though those which are more practitioner-orientated (e.g., public administration) may take four years, with one year taken up by a stage. Similarly programmes in European or American Studies, or those taken with a foreign language, are likely to include a year abroad at a foreign institution or at a stage. The result, as Hayward (1996) noted, is that most British students finish their first degree programme (normally three years) by the age of 22-24 or earlier, an age generally much younger than their European counterparts, where many students follow four or five year B.A. or M.A. level courses, and where entry into higher education may be delayed by military service.

Despite the ever-increasing student rolls, however, the number of teachers of political science is relatively small when it is considered as a percentage of all academics (3%) in the U.K., and the discipline remains a modest one in terms of size in most universities. More recently there has been a growth in numbers: Hayward (1996) reported a 1993 figure of some 1,338 academics practising political science. Today that figure has grown to just over 2100. Three trends are noteworthy: first there has been a considerable increase in the number of women into the profession over the last fifteen years. A PSA Survey in 2003 reported that over a quarter of the profession was female, although it was still overwhelmingly (96%) white. Second, there has been a growth in the number of academic employed on temporary contracts, albeit over 85 per cent of UK political scientists are employed on permanent contracts. Third, since 1993 there has been an increase in the numbers employed on a part time basis, although currently this is less than 5 per cent. Over three quarters of UK political scientists are employed in 'old' universities, with only just over a fifth working in the 'new' universities or former polytechnics. Fewer staff in the 'new' universities are full professors (22%), as compared to around 30 per cent in the 'old' universities. The age profile of the profession suggests that it will face a retirement/replacement problem over the next 10 to 15 years. Almost one in three had sought to change jobs in the year before the survey, with 80 per cent seeking to stay in higher education.

### *Teaching and research interests*

Table 1 below gives details of the research interests of UK political scientists drawn from surveys of the profession conducted between 1987 and 1993. In terms of research interests, where the categories overlap, there is a strong consistency in the proportions of political scientists researching in different sub-areas of the discipline. The area of marked increase is in International Relations, a reflection of both the increased demand amongst students to work in the area at undergraduate and postgraduate levels over recent years. The other main area of growth has been in European Union studies, a reflection of the changing importance of the European Union (EU) over this period. The table also suggests a reasonably strong overlap between individual's teaching and research interests, if the 2003 figures are any guide. And of course it should be remembered that most academics teach and research in more than one area of the discipline, though the table does reveal that more people have to teach research methods than actually research in the field.

In terms of postgraduate studies, political science has proved to be the most popular of social sciences in terms of both Master's and doctoral levels. Taught Master's programmes grew quickly from the 1970s onwards, most being of one year's duration and generally of a specialised nature. Such spe-

cialisation may include inter alia such sub-areas of the discipline as Political Behaviour, Political Thought, Research Methods, International Relations, and Area Studies. Most will contain a strong methods element, especially given the increasing requirement for improved methodological competence as part of doctoral studies. For most of the last 10 years, the main studentship awarding body for doctoral studies, the Economic and Social Research Council, has been increasing the requirements for methodology as part of UK doctoral programmes that are recognised by the Council. Whilst such recognition does not preclude universities from offering doctoral programmes (universities being autonomous bodies able to determine what degree programmes they wish to offer), it is important for universities to have such recognition if they are to attract graduate applicants. Notwithstanding this proviso, however, it is important to remember that UK institutions have large numbers of (relatively high) fee paying international students following post-graduate programmes, and that many doctoral students pursue their studies on a part time basis, more out of love for the subject than from any other ambition. Again the ESRC imposes conditions on the doctoral programmes it recognises, among which is the expectation that the majority of its doctoral students will complete their studies within a four-year period. Failure to reach this target means that an institution may lose recognition of its programmes.

*Table 1:* Teaching and research interests: UK political scientists, 1987-2003

Field	1987 research %	1993 research %	2003 teaching %	2003 research %
American Politics			11.1	7.1
British Politics	28.0	24.0	31.2	24.9
Comparative Politics	38.0	36.0	35.0	25.4
Development Studies			11.1	8.9
Environment Politics			6.6	5.9
European Countries			27.4	22.1
European Union			25.2	24.7
Gender Studies	4.0	5.0	8.5	7.1
International Relations	17.0	20.0	35.8	30.0
Local Government	12.0	10.0	10.5	11.6
Political Behaviour	11.0	10.0	12.5	11.8
Political Theory	23.0	22.0	24.7	21.3
Political Philosophy			14.5	13.4
Public Administration/Policy	23.0	22.0	21.5	20.7
Political Economy			14.7	15.6
Political Sociology			12.3	11.6
Research Methods			25.2	8.3
Other	11.0	10.0	21.6	19.5

Source: 1989/1993 figures as reported in Hayward (1996); 2003 figures supplied by the UK PSA. The latter figures are based on a survey of individuals: the former on a survey of departments.

*Issues of quality in teaching and research*

ESRC recognition of doctoral programmes and the awarding of studentships are but one area in which UK political science has been subject to increasing inspection and regulation. Whilst there is an attempt to maintain the fiction of 'parity of esteem' amongst all institutions and all degree programmes (regardless of discipline), so that theoretically a degree from Oxford is the same as that from Poppleton University<sup>5</sup>, the introduction of national research assessment exercises in the 1980s and of similar teaching quality assessment exercises in the 1990s under the auspices of the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) have re-enforced the trend noted by Hayward (1996) towards semi-official league tables, mainly produced by such national newspapers as *The Times*, *Guardian* and the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

It is difficult to estimate the impact that such exercises have had on political science in the UK. Much of the research undertaken in political science does not require substantial funding. Political theorists simply need time to reflect on the problems engaging them, or perhaps some funds to visit archives containing rare sources. Much work in comparative politics and public policy simply requires travel money to visit the country being studied. At the other end of the spectrum, much electoral research is necessarily relatively expensive. However, political scientists in the UK are facing increasing pressure from their universities to attract research funding for two reasons, full economic costing (FEC) and the research assessment exercise (RAE).

Underlying the move towards FEC for research projects is a broader debate about how research should be funded in British universities. There is a broad consensus that the RAE to be held in 2008 is likely to be the last one. There are a variety of reasons for this: the transaction costs of the exercise both for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (and the counterpart bodies in Scotland and Wales); the increasing difficulty of finding adequate methods of differentiation at the top of the range, making discrimination in the provision of funding more difficult; and controversies about the methodologies used. It seems likely that the 'R' element of public funding that universities receive, based on their RAE performance, will increasingly be displaced by bidding for competitive funds from the research councils, for most political scientists the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), although an increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary projects with natural scientists has meant that some political scientists are now being funded by natural science research councils, e.g., in the Rural Economy and Land Use (RELU) programme. Ironically, one of the consequences of a shift to competitive bidding funding would be an increase in transaction costs for aca-

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5 Poppleton is a fictitious institution whose activities feature in Laurie Taylor's column in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

demics, both in terms of appraising the bids, but also in terms of a constant pressure to file new funding applications.

Research councils already pay a substantial overhead on research grants awarded which goes to help fund the infrastructure costs of universities and this overhead is likely to be increased to 80 per cent under FEC. One consequence is that it is less attractive in financial terms to make research applications to private charitable foundations. Foundations such as Leverhulme and Nuffield have been important sources of funds for political scientists and are often perceived as more approachable, less bureaucratic and less concerned about constructive deviations from the original research proposal than the research councils. Along with the British Academy, which receives public funds, the Nuffield Foundation has provided small research grants on which rapid decisions are taken. These have been very useful for running pilot projects which might lead to a larger study and have also been a valuable mechanism for young political scientists to obtain their first research grant.

The ESRC has a budget of £119 million, nearly two thirds of which is spent on research and just under one third on training doctoral students. There has been some controversy about the way in which the ESRC has disbursed its research funds. In broad terms, grants are provided in three ways. First, there is the 'response' mode. Any academic can submit an application on a topic that is within the remit of the ESRC and if it is below £100,000, a decision will be taken relatively quickly. This is a particularly useful route for political scientists at an early stage in their career. Second, research grants are provided as a part of a 'programme' that has a central organising theme, hopefully combining academic and policy relevance. There is a hope that the sum will be greater than its parts, that the researchers will benefit from interaction with each other on the intellectual and substantive problems they are tackling. Whether this works out in practice depends in part on the programme directors who have to strike a difficult balance between not interfering in the work of the researchers and yet bringing together the often disparate projects in a coherent whole. Despite these challenges, there have been a number of successful programmes in the area of political science in recent years. Examples include the One Europe or Several? Programme which was a five year research programme allocated £4m and completed in 2003; the Future Governance Programme, completed in 2004, which consisted of thirty projects which examined the scope for drawing public policy lessons from cross-national experience; and the Devolution and Constitutional Change programme set up in 2000 and concerned with new political institutions in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions.

The third way in which funding is provided takes the form of research grants to ESRC research 'centres' such as the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation at Warwick University. These centres normally

seek to bring together a number of disciplines, e.g., the Warwick centre was essentially based around a joint venture between economics and politics and international studies but also brought in other disciplines such as law, sociology and business studies. The centres are funded for an initial five years, renewable for five years and there is now the possibility of some funding beyond the 10 year period. The centres are encouraged to bid for additional funds from other research foundations, but the ESRC funds a core of research staff. This represents a substantial commitment of resources for the ESRC and some political scientists consider that more value added is obtained from response mode and programme work.

Funding from the European Union through framework programmes has been a significant source of funding for some political scientists. This funding source is more relevant for political scientists undertaking work that has public policy implications that have been the subject of EU attention, e.g., environmental policy.

The transaction costs, both in terms of assembling a cross-national network and completing complicated forms, are perceived to be high and the bureaucracy involved deters many potential applicants. Some political scientists have founded the COST (the French acronym for European Cooperation in the Field of Scientific and Technical Research) committees a useful mechanism for building networks within Europe that can then be used as a basis for a framework programme bid or for a more modest form of research funding.

In research terms, UK political scientists are under a constant pressure to publish the expected quota of publications (or better) in the period between each research exercise – or perish as researchers. The pressure is perhaps greatest on new recruits into the profession, who will be expected to have completed their doctorate and to have published one or two articles before appointment, if not to have a book published or almost in press. Each subsequent assessment exercise ramps up the expectations of the quality of publications and level and degree of research activity by departments and individuals. An excellent performance in the RAE is expected, not only of the best-rated institutions, but also in many others, especially as HEFC funding for research is tied to the rating for the discipline.<sup>6</sup>

The RAE is conducted on the basis of peer group review. Membership of the relevant panels is announced well in advance, together with the criteria on which judgements will be made. The professional association will have had consultative input into both the criteria and the panel membership. To date there have been four such exercises since 1986, and the next exercise,

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6 Essentially a rationing exercise, given limited funds, the RAE works best for those disciplines where research is expensive to fund – such as the natural sciences. For the much cheaper humanities and social sciences, it is doubtful whether the benefits outweigh the costs (and individual efforts) involved.

due in 2008, is expected to be the last and thus currently assumes great importance.

The RAE has been a controversial feature of university life in the United Kingdom that has had a profound effect on political science and other disciplines. The first RAE was held in 1992, although it was preceded by more limited and less systematic attempts to assess research quality. It was followed by further exercises in 1996 and 2001 with the next one scheduled for 2008. The official view is that the RAE is a peer review based assessment of quality that allows the higher education funding bodies to distribute public funds for research selectively. Institutions conducting the best research receive a large proportion of the available grant so that the infrastructure for the top level of research in universities is protected and developed. This is said to facilitate the international competitiveness of British research, particularly with the United States and to ensure that public funds are well used.

One of the criticisms of the RAE made from the humanities and social sciences has been that it has been driven by an inappropriate natural sciences model of research. Much research in the natural sciences requires the use of expensive equipment which needs to be concentrated in a relatively small number of locations characterised by excellence. Much research in the social sciences has been more individualistic and does not require expensive equipment, although arguably there are benefits from collaborating with a body of scholars with similar interests in one location, even if the internet has reduced some of the transaction costs associated with collaboration with researchers located elsewhere. There have also been criticisms of some of the inconsistencies and anomalies associated with the methodologies used in the RAE.

The case for the RAE is often presented in financial and international competitiveness terms, but there is an academic case as well. In the past many political science departments in the UK were characterised by something that came close to anti-research culture, in which old Oxbridge values regarded 'scribbling' with disfavour unless it seemed to demonstrate 'effortless superiority'. The pursuit of scholarship was often associated with a rather elitist culture in which circulation of ideas among a restricted group of experts was favoured over wider dissemination. New career entrants today encounter a more positive research environment in which they are given a variety of forms of help, support and training to develop their research. There are also opportunities for much more rapid promotion compared with the stagnation that the discipline encountered in the difficult years of the 1990s. Full professorial salaries are no longer held back by a professorial 'average' and, although less common than in the natural sciences, economics or business studies, salaries around the six figure mark in UK pounds are not unknown.

The RAE has inevitably produced a sharper and more clearly defined hi-

erarchy of universities and departments, although that would probably have occurred in any case, particularly after the upgrading of the polytechnics into universities in 1992 and the subsequent creation of additional new universities. Political Science did well in the last exercise in 2001, though the financial outcome was not as good as many would have hoped. Table 2 gives details of the scores, with 5\* indicating that the quality of research is of both international and national quality, and 3a indicating that the work is of national status. Departments were graded from 1 to 5\* in the 2001 RAE, but no funding was provided from 3A and below, while research funds for Grade 4 departments were cut back by over forty per cent. One consequence of these funding decisions was to put severe pressure on smaller political science departments in traditional universities. The Political Studies Association (PSA) campaigned vigorously in conjunction with other social science associations to halt projected further cuts in funding for Grade 4 departments and met the then higher education minister. A number of departments in former polytechnics did well in the 2001 RAE with De Montfort University, based in Leicester, receiving a Grade 5, while Coventry University, the University of the West of England at Bristol and Westminster University received Grade 4s.

The results represented a substantial improvement over the previous exercise for the discipline, an improvement also achieved by many others, reflecting not just an improvement in quality but also a greater understanding in many institutions of how best to play the research assessment game. 69 Politics and International Studies submissions were made to the 2001 RAE, but only five institutions received the coveted Grade 5\* award. The University of Essex has a strongly established reputation in areas such as electoral studies. King's College London has a distinctive reputation in the area of War Studies. The University of Oxford had the second largest entry (70.5 staff) and is known for the breadth as well as the depth of its coverage of the discipline. The University of Sheffield provides an example of a way in which a department can be built up through good management with a particular reputation in the area of political economy. The University of Wales, Aberystwyth, is noted for its strength in international studies. Two universities which have a deserved reputation for their contribution to the discipline received Grade 5 scores: the London School of Economics (LSE) and the University of Manchester. Organised in separate departments of government and international relations, LSE entered the largest number of staff of any unit of assessment (76). Like Oxford, it is known for the breadth and depth of its contribution and houses a number of well-known leading figures in the discipline. Manchester was one of the pioneer departments of British political science and also contains a number of leading figures, complemented since 2001 by the recruitment of excellent younger staff. In Scotland, no departments received a 5\*, but three received a 5 (Glasgow, St. Andrews, Strath-

clyde). Queen's University Belfast also received a 5 grade.

As a result, HEFCE found it could not fund institutions at the kind of level that had followed the previous exercise, with the result that those scoring a 3a lost all research funding, whilst those scoring a 5 were reduced to the funding level previously available to a 4 rated department. Such a funding result not only failed to reward improvements in research effort, but seriously undermined the credibility of the exercise and HEFCE itself. The government subsequently found some extra monies to fund research, but wanted it distributed to the better-rated departments. One result was that those departments which had previously been rated 5\* and had maintained their score in the 2001 exercise were now rated 6\* - so that they could receive additional monies. In the 2003 PSA Survey of the profession, fewer than one in five respondents thought the implementation of funding was satisfactory. There was subsequent review of the research assessment exercise, (the Roberts Review), which resulted in a considerably changed set of rules and panels for the next exercise in 2008. The UK PSA was consulted about the form of the new exercise and was broadly supportive of the new proposals.

Table2: HEFCE research ratings, Politics, 2001

5*	5	4	3a	3b
Essex	Aston+	Brunel	Central England	Derby
King's Coll (War Studies)	Bath+	Cambridge	Huddersfield	Middlesex
Oxford	Birkbeck	Coventry	Kent	
Sheffield	Bradford (Peace Studies)	Durham	King's Coll (Defence Studs)	
Aberystwyth	Bristol	East Anglia	Leeds Met	
	Cardiff+	Goldsmiths+	London Met	
	De Montfort	Kent+	Manchester Met	
	Exeter	Lancaster	Northumbria+	
	Lancaster+	Leeds	Nottingham Trent	
	LSE	Liverpool	Open	
	Loughboro+	Nottingham	Oxford Brookes	
	Manchester	Queen Mary	Plymouth	
	Portsmouth+	Southampton	Staffordshire	
	Reading	Sussex	South Bank+	
	Salford+	West of England	Sunderland	
	Surrey+	Westminster	Univ Coll	
	Univ Coll+	Aberdeen	Wolverhampton	
	Warwick	Dundee	Robert Gordon	
	York	Edinburgh	Stirling	
	Glasgow	Herriot Watt+	Swansea	
	Strathclyde	Paisley+	Ulster	
	Queens/Belfast			

Note: + = European Studies with substantial politics staff.

The 2008 RAE introduces a new feature in the form of a 'main panel' grouping a number of disciplines which is intended to ensure greater consistency across disciplines and overcome not entirely unjustified suspicions that some

disciplines conspired to boost their grades. However, the main work will be done by the Politics and International relations sub-panel, chaired by Professor Tony Payne from Sheffield, a widely respected figure. The two professional associations, the PSA and the British International Studies Association (BISA) were closely consulted in the selection of the sub-panel member whose interests cover various aspects of the discipline. A quality profile will be constructed from each department with scores ranging from classified to 4, representing work that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour. In constructing the quality profile, a 75 per cent weighting will be given to research outputs, normally four pieces of work submitted for each individual nominated which will be read by the sub-panel. A 20 per cent weighting will be given to research environment, e.g., research income and doctoral students, and 5 per cent to esteem which in broad terms is a reflection of involvement in the wider profession. The decisions made will have a profound impact on the future funding and standing of political science departments.

The other issue which political science faced at the turn of the Millennium was the introduction of teaching quality assessments, which applied to all disciplines taught in all higher education institutions. The exercises were carried out by the UK Quality Assurance Agency. These began in 1993, and the first exercises left something to be desired, with the first review of history provoking considerable outcry. As a result the UK PSA expressed its views about the need for changes: one result was that the assessment of the discipline was delayed until 2000-2001, by which time the whole system of quality assurance was under review. The UK PSA was also active in helping departments prepare for the review through meetings with heads of departments, and the fact that the subject came late in the day meant that most institutions had experienced numerous reviews in other subjects, so were well able to prepare for the review. As a result, Politics and International Relations generally emerged well from the teaching quality assessment, with at least a third of the departments being rated excellent for teaching, achieving a total score of 22-24 across the six elements that were assessed. Though departments such as Oxford, Essex, Manchester and Sheffield all achieved a score of 24/24, they were also joined by less well known institutions such as De Montfort and Greenwich universities. The process involved a two to three day visit from a review team made up of an independent professional review chair and up to four peer reviewers drawn from a range of institutions. Despite the fact that review teams spent considerable time in the classroom attending lectures, seminars and tutorials, as well as reading students' written work, considerable emphasis was placed on meetings with staff where they were expected to demonstrate how they achieved excellence in teaching, be it in curriculum matters, students support and guidance, student progression and achievements, etc. Whilst the exercise overall no doubt helped establish

that the teaching of political science at British universities is of a high quality, it also proved a costly and time consuming one for most departments. In particular it required departments to prove huge, if not excessive, amounts of documentation. Again the 2003 PSA Survey reports that fewer than a quarter of respondents felt that such assessments 'provide a welcome opportunity to reflect on teaching and administration. Nevertheless, results in the exercise, together with those in the research assessment reviews, play an important part in the production of institutional league tables produced by national newspapers, with many institutions using the results of both exercises in their recruitment publicity.

Two further matters have been of some concern recently, essentially linked to each other. The first is the question of a core curriculum for political science, whilst the second concerns benchmarking for the discipline. The question of the core curriculum emerged as part of the debate around the Bologna process and the nature of a three-year B.A. Together with other national associations and the European Political Science Network (epsNet), the PSA had submitted a document on a core curriculum for political science to the Berlin meeting on the Bologna process in 2003. In this context it is interesting to note that 65 per cent of respondents to the 2003 Survey did not think there was a need for such a core curriculum, perhaps more a reflection of the UK traditions of academic autonomy than any belief that there were not some subjects that should always be part of a political science B.A. degree.

Subject benchmarking arose out of discussions between the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), higher education institutions and other interested parties in the middle to late 1990s. An initial study, based on three subject areas, concluded that benchmarking was possible, though not without its difficulties (QAA 1998). Benchmarking came about as one of a range of exercises undertaken in the 1980s by the QAA in order to demonstrate the quality assurance of British higher education. QAA invited subject groups to undertake benchmarking exercises, and a political science and international relations group produced its recommendations in 2000 (QAA 2000; Buckler 2002).

### **1.3 Staff and student recruitment**

Hayward (1996) noted the autonomous nature of British universities, notwithstanding their dependence on central government and its agencies for much of their funding, both for teaching and research. Recruitment of staff is undertaken by each institution separately, through advertisement and interview. It is not unusual for there to be more than 50 applications for a post,

though those at senior level attract fewer applications. At senior level, (i.e., to full professorships), the interviewing panel, which is normally chaired by the head of the university, will normally include two external assessors (senior professors from other institutions), protecting against the possibility of a self-recruiting and self-perpetuating oligarchy emerging. Nevertheless, with the ever-increasing importance of the RAE, a 'market' for well-qualified professors has (unofficially) come into existence, with the better rated institutions often seeking to maintain or improve their positions by either recruiting professors from other institutions or dissuading their staff from leaving, often by offering them a professorship. One result has been some improvement in pay levels at the senior level, though generally pay in higher education has declined over the years in comparison to other similar occupations in the UK. Again the 2003 PSA Survey reports some dissatisfaction with pay and conditions, with almost two thirds having considered leaving the profession at some point. Low pay, stress, long hours and administrative overload are the reasons most often cited, and there can be little doubt that the impact of research assessment and the increase in student numbers participating in higher education have helped make an academic career less attractive to the best qualified graduates than perhaps was the case thirty or forty years ago.

As Hayward (1996) noted, student admissions are undertaken by each institution on an extremely competitive basis. Under a national scheme, undergraduate students apply for degree programmes of their choice at a limited number of institutions. Selection is on the basis of their end of school examinations and some interviewing and institutional visit by university departments. Additionally some students can be recruited through what is known as the clearing process, whereby students who fail to gain entry to their most preferred course can apply to other programmes at other institutions in the weeks before the first semester begins. Politics departments will have been given a target by their university for the number of students they are expected to recruit and have to make sufficient offers to places to ensure they hit or exceed their target – quite a risky business. Postgraduate students are recruited directly by each university, again generally on the basis of the undergraduate degree grades. A marked feature of many UK higher education institutions is the number of EU or other foreign students on their courses at all levels. Thus, for example, more than half of LSE's students come from non-EU countries. Generally speaking, Britain has been one of the more successful countries in recruiting overseas students, with a long history of such activity. After the United States and Australia, it has been particularly active in overseas recruitment, particularly in the Far East.

#### *Professional communication: the role of the PSA and BISA*

As noted earlier, there are two professional associations in the discipline in

Britain, the PSA and BISA, the latter organisation being founded by Susan Strange in the mid-1970s. The two associations work closely together, particularly on important policy issues. Each association has a representative on the other's executive committee and there were close informal contacts between the office holders during discussions about the 2008 RAE. Both associations publish journals and a newsletter: a family of four journals in the case of PSA, the *Review of International Studies* from BISA. Additionally many British political scientists act as editors for, or as members of editorial boards, of a large number of international and national journals. Each association has an extensive network of specialist groups dealing with particular aspects of the subject. These specialist groups are in many ways the lifeblood of the associations, organising their own workshops and organising panels at annual conferences. A particularly active group with the PSA is the Election, Parties and Public Opinion Group (EPOP). It organises an annual conference that brings together practitioners and academics working in the field of election studies and has now launched its own journal, the *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*. Both associations have an annual conference, although the format and organisation of this event is the subject of continual discussion and review. The two associations cooperate in the organisation of a Heads of Departments conference which enables discussion of contemporary higher education policy issues as they relate to politics and international studies.

Membership of the PSA has increased substantially in recent years. At the end of 1998, PSA had 876 members; by the end of 2004, PSA had 1,554 members and this number has continued to increase. BISA has around 1000 members. Some individuals are members of both organisations and benefit from a discount on a second membership. Nevertheless, there are a considerable number of individuals working in politics and international studies departments who are not members of either organisation, either because their principal disciplinary identity is elsewhere (e.g., history, philosophy, geography) or because they prepare to concentrate on more specialised organisations.

Because of the income it receives from its journals, which accounts for just over 60 per cent of its total income, PSA is better funded than BISA, although BISA finances are improving. The PSA operates from an office at the University of Newcastle and has two full-time staff plus part-timers and consultants. The PSA has been seeking to enhance the discipline's profile among practitioners of politics and the media with some success. An important part of this effort is the annual Awards Ceremony which is held in London and honours politicians, media analysts and academics. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, was honoured as Politician of the Year at the 2004 Awards Ceremony and used the occasion to make a major speech on *Britishness*.

Because of the many challenges that academics have faced in British higher education, both associations have had to develop considerable effort to developing their capacity to contribute to the development of higher education policy, often working in conjunction with other associations in the social science. Apart from the RAE, the development of the systematic assessment of quality standards in teaching and the development of benchmark standards for each discipline has required close attention, as has the Bologna process at a European level. The PSA has given considerable emphasis to the development of a dialogue with the ESRC and contacts are also maintained with the Politics Section of the British Academy. In addition it has been prepared to meet with officials of HEFCE, the QAA and from government departments when the need has arisen.

The PSA has invested considerable resources in developing relations with the American Political Science Association (APSA). APSA officers regularly visit the annual conference of the PSA and a meeting to review progress in developing relations between the two associations is held at the APSA annual meeting. PSA nominates a panel at the APSA annual meeting and provides funds for its members to attend. PSA is a member of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), but relations have not always been easy and in 2005 PSA was not a member of the Executive Committee despite being the second largest political science membership association in the world. PSA has welcomed the development of a standing conference of European political science associations with the next step being to put this arrangement on a more formal and systematic basis. All these developments represent a growing trend towards internationalisation of the discipline, with many British political scientists being individual members of APSA and attending and presenting papers at its annual meeting, as well as participating in the activities of its *British Politics Group*. Additionally, British political science departments constitute the largest group in the European Consortium for Political Research, whilst several departments and individuals are active in the European Political Science Network (epsNet)

## 2 The future of political science in the UK

The demand for politics and international studies courses in the UK is buoyant at undergraduate and postgraduate level with a particular interest displayed in courses with an international relations and Global South emphases. There seems to have been something of a 9/11 effect in boosting undergraduate applications. Politics showed one of the biggest subject increases in the 2002 undergraduate entry with applications up by 14.4 per cent. Undergraduate course applications have continued to rise, up 13 per cent year on

ate course applications have continued to rise, up 13 per cent year on year for single honours politics courses starting in this current session (2005-6), while MA applications have also shown a marked increase with particular interest in areas such as international political economy, the European Union and other regional studies programmes.

Higher Education Statistics Agency figures for 2002-3 showed that politics and international studies graduates did slightly less well in the job market than graduates across the board. 30 per cent were employed in a graduate job, compared with an average of 39 per cent across all subjects. 34 per cent were employed in a non-graduate job, as against 29 per cent for all subjects. 8 per cent were unemployed, slightly more than the 7 per cent figure recorded for all subjects. Graduates from the discipline develop a range of employment related skills and are known for their flexibility. Hence, they enter a wide range of careers. They are generally more successful in media careers than graduates in English and media studies and this represents a key career destination with many prominent figures in broadcasting and the print media having a first degree that included the study of politics and international relations. Government and public administration, including the National Health Service and local government, remains a popular career destination. With the expansion of the security services in response to the terrorist threat, this is becoming increasingly important as a career destination for some students. Some students enter private sector jobs, but teaching is not a common career destination, except perhaps for students who have taken a joint degree in history and politics and then teach both subjects. Politics is not, however, a national curriculum subject. Graduates who become politicians are the exception rather than the rule.

Even highly rated departments are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit staff of the required quality from within the United Kingdom. This is not a problem that is confined to political science and is more acute in disciplines such as economics. Many Ph.D. students do not go on to apply for academic jobs some, for example, preferring the higher salaries and more rapid promotion available in educational administration. As a result, staffs are increasingly recruited from outside the UK, leading to more cosmopolitan departments. Australia, Canada and New Zealand are traditional recruiting grounds, but if anything the numbers of staff drawn from there has increased. There is also a long standing tradition of Americans taking up positions in UK universities, although they require work permits. A new trend has been the recruitment of staff elsewhere in Europe, with a surplus of candidates with Ph.D.s acting as a push factor and relatively high salaries and the reputation of UK universities acting as a pull factor. Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries have been relatively strong recruiting grounds, reflecting the strength of political science in those countries, but staff has also been recruited from France, Italy and Greece.

Political science in the UK has always been something of a ‘junction’ subject, having close links with other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, and this has been both a source of strength and a weakness. Together with the absence of a ruling orthodoxy about theory and methodology, it opens up the subject to a variety of approaches and perspectives, but also means that it is sometimes too eclectic and lacking a clear identity. This is reinforced by a tendency towards greater specialisation in defined niche subjects. Establishing a reputation in one of these is often seen as the most effective route to career success. This can mean a neglect of ‘grand narratives’ on democracy, conflict, and power whose analysis and understanding is essential addressing the ‘who gains’ and ‘who loses’ questions that are at the heart of the study of politics.

### 3 Conclusion

Despite the difficulties which the profession has faced over the last 10 to 15 years, British political science remains second only to the US in terms of its number of academics, and the quality of its teaching and research is constantly of a high standard. Some of its departments are world renowned, able to attract the best under- and postgraduates, as well as internationally recognised academics. Despite their sometimes eclectic nature (which could be seen as one of their strengths) British political scientists are active internationally, be it at the European level in EU funded research programmes, or in organisations such as ECPR and epsNET and their specialist groups. They take part in American meetings organised by APSA and other groups in the United States, whilst their own association together with BISA flourishes and provides support that permits members to take part in the activities of a large number of specialist groups. Equally well they attract significant research funding from national research councils, demonstrating their ability to respond to calls for research applications in what are often highly specialised fields. Despite the challenges it faces, both as a profession and as individuals, British political science in the new millennium is one of, if not the strongest in Europe – and long may it continue to be so.

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