

**ROYAUME-UNI / UNITED KINGDOM**



# POLITICAL SCIENCE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Science having a universal vocation, it feels uncomfortable to treat it in terms of national approaches rather than in terms of contending theoretical, methodological or empirical interpretations of a body of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is correct to acknowledge the culture-bound character and state-sustaining functions that have all too frequently characterised much of political science. While the existence of a strong indigenous tradition affords the capacity to resist the uncritical wholesale importation of foreign approaches with their baggage train of assumptions, it has led in the UK to a traditional reluctance of political science to see itself as part of a world-wide discipline. American behaviouralism was trenchantly resisted in the mid-twentieth century, with Bernard Crick's «*The American Science of Politics*» (1959) giving the lie to those who too readily refer to an « Anglo-Saxon » (meaning Anglo-American with the accent on American) approach to politics. The same resistance has been offered to the latest American orthodoxy - rational choice - although, as in the case of behaviouralism, there is a very partial and incremental adoption of some of its precepts and methods by the familiar process of dynamic conservatism : changing just enough to avoid fundamental change. There is much less concern amongst UK political scientists to defend a nation state standpoint, if only because politicians and senior officials do not turn readily to academics to solicit their policy advice and support.

## 1. TEACHING AND RESEARCH

The Political Studies Association of the UK (P.S.A.) periodically surveys those who **teach** political science but not those who **study** the subject. In the time at my disposal, I shall rely on the most recent survey (1995) for some of the information sought, supplementing it as appropriate.

Table 1 indicates the modest revival in the 1987-93 years, after the rapid expansion of the 1960s and 1970s and the dramatic contraction of the 1980s. However, the modest place of political science in British universities should place these developments in perspective. The percentage of academic staff engaged in political science actually declined from 2.1 in 1966 to 1.7 in 1977 (Lovenduski, 1981, p. 2 and Newton, 1981) and in terms of relative size it remains a minor university discipline. The period of savage cuts in university expenditure resulted in a dramatic fall of about 15% in the number of political scientists holding university posts in the years between 1981-91. The subsequent recovery shown in Table 1 compares the findings of a 1987 P.S.A. survey by Hugh Berrington and Pippa Norris with that conducted by David Denver

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\*As is common in all evaluations of this type, this report solely engages the responsibility of the author, and does not express the opinions of the institutions or associations he belongs to.

and David Farrell in 1994. The recent increase in posts shows some worrying features. The shift towards fixed term as against permanent appointments means that one in five in 1993 were temporary, a trend that can be expected to increase over the decade. More encouraging is some correction in the sex imbalance, with a 5% increase in the proportion of female political scientists.

Table 1 : The political science profession, 1987-1993

		<b>1987</b>	<b>1993</b>	
		(%)	(%)	
Sector	Old University	70	71	
	Poly/New University	30	29	
		(1,068)	(1,338)	
Tenure	Permanent	88	80	
	Temporary	12	20	
		(1,035)	(1,255)	
	Full-time	94	94	
	Part-time	6	6	
		(1,043)	(1,268)	
Sex	Male	88	83	
	Female	12	17	
		(1,051)	(1,299)	
Subject	Comparative Politics	38	36	
	British Politics	28	24	
	Public Administration	23	22	
	Political Theory	23	22	
	International Relations	17	20	
	Political Behaviour	11	10	
	Local/Urban Politics	12	10	
	Women	4	5	
	Other	11	10	
Area	UK	47	45	
	Western Europe	29	30	
	USA	17	14	
	Eastern Europe	11	13	
	Middle and Far East	8	9	
	Africa	7	5	
	Latin America	5	5	
	Other Developing	4	4	
	Other	4	3	
		(949)	(1,218)	

Source : Denver and Farrell in *PSA News*, Winter 1995, p. 7.

Turning to the distribution by sub-discipline, Table 1 shows that the study of political institutions remains important while British politics has suffered a significant fall, indicating a decline in parochialism (to which we shall return in discussing academic journals). There has also been a modest erosion of other mainstream sub-disciplines : comparative politics, political theory, public administration and local politics, which have been traditionally prominent in Britain. There has been a decline in the teaching of African and US politics, while international relations has been experiencing dynamic expansion. The modest relative growth for Western Europe conceals an increasing importance to the study of the European Union both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, while Eastern Europe has had a more significant expansion.

While Table 2 only provides figures for eighteen months (January 1993-June 1994), it shows the pressure to recruit political scientists specialising in European politics, which exceeded all others very significantly. This reflects mobility within a sub-discipline as well as the overall increase in demand for a particular specialism.

Table 2 : Specialisms requested in politics vacancies advertised in «Education Guardian», January 1993 - June 1994  
N.B. : qualification for inclusion : minimum of 7 advertised vacancies.

Specialism requested	Advertised vacancies			
	1993	1993	1994	Total
	Jan.-June	July-Dec.	Jan.-June	
European politics	18	6	7	31
British politics	10	4	4	18
Political thought	6	2	9	17
International relations	4	4	8	16
Political economy	4	3	4	11
Public policy	4	2	5	11
Comparative politics	3	3	4	10
U.S. politics	1	1	5	7
Eastern Europe/Russia	2	1	4	7

Source : Jon Tonge, «Many Called, A Few More Chosen» , *PSA News Extra*, October 1994, p. 20.

That this demand for European politics exceeds the supply is indicated by the fact that the number of applications for such posts was in a particular instance only one third of those for a general post in political science in the same university. The survey quoted in Table 2 indicates that the average number of applicants per post in 1993-94 was 50.8, indicative of the highly competitive nature of recruitment to the profession even before the 1996 cuts in university expenditure were imposed, which will intensify the pressures arising from the growth in the number with postgraduate qualifications.

Following the elevation of the former polytechnics into universities (some would say that most universities have been demoted financially into polytechnics) there are now 87 university institutions in which political science is taught. These range from departments with over fifty political scientists (London School of Economics, Manchester and Oxford) to many with only a handful of appointments. While there is an attempt to maintain the fiction of « parity of esteem », the recourse to research assessment and teaching quality assessment under the auspices of the Higher Education Funding Council have encouraged the trend away from an

unofficial « pecking order » into an official league table. The departments with few political scientists are usually unable to teach politics except as an adjunct of some other discipline, which is a partial reversion to the pre-expansion situation of the first half of the century. However, rather than a small number of « all-rounders », small departments or sub-departments try to specialise to acquire a recognisably distinctive profile.

The teaching of politics takes the form of either a specialist politics degree (which unlike continental Europe has no traditional link with law studies) or a joint degree with one or two other subjects. Joint degrees frequently combine politics with economics, modern history, law, philosophy and sociology. Oxford has never taught politics as a specialist degree but combines it with philosophy and economics in « PPE ». Duration of an undergraduate BA first degree is usually three years but is commonly extended to four years when combined with the study of a foreign language. Masters degrees by examination (MA, MSc) are usually taught over one year but the Oxford MPhil lasts two years, combining examinations with a short thesis. Doctorates are expected to take 3-4 years but this depends upon whether the student has done preliminary work in the form of a short thesis for an MA or MPhil.

Principally because of strict selection at the point of entry, the failure rates among British political science students are very low and most first degree students complete their degree in three years, between the ages of 18-22. Only a small minority of students continue with postgraduate study, partly because high fees are charged and are not paid by local authorities as is usually the case in undergraduate studies. Masters degrees are usually completed in one or two years, after which there is a further reduction in the number that proceed to doctoral studies. However, a feature of the last twenty years has been the fact that most people appointed to teach politics in universities either have a doctorate on appointment or are in the final stages of completing one, marking the increasing professionalisation of political science in Britain. Doctoral students and young staff in Britain, unlike some continental European countries, do not « assist the Professor » but work independently, with the advice of their supervisors and senior colleagues, who do not use them as research assistants.

University teachers are recruited separately by each institution, through advertisement and interview. To guard against the emergence of a self-recruiting and self-perpetuating professional oligarchy - which is a danger of decentralised recruitment that seeks to avoid the type of political influence that can intrude into centralised recruitment - two external assessors (senior professors from other universities) are involved in the selection of holders of chairs. It is unusual for a department to be identified with a particular school of thought, so students are exposed to a variety of approaches in a thoroughly pluralist way.

Student admission is highly competitive on the basis of application through a national scheme for undergraduates and separately by each university for postgraduates. Students express preferences for a limited number of universities and are usually selected on the basis of their end of school examinations and some interviewing by each university department. So politics departments have a university target of the number of students to admit and have the responsibility of seeking to make enough offers of places (conditional on pre-entry examination performance) to hit its target - rather a risky business. By extrapolating from staff/student ratios and bearing in mind that students do all, half or a third of their studies in politics, we can estimate the total of political science students at roughly 15,000 - a very modest number by contrast with countries whose universities have a less severely selective recruitment policy.

At the end of their first year students usually sit a qualifying examination to proceed to the second year. Some politics degrees have a Part 1 examination at the end of the second year and others set all 3 hour examinations at the end of the third year. Increasingly, continuous assessment of written work in the second and third years contribute to the final degree classification (First Class Honours, Upper Second, Lower Second, Third, Pass and Fail) of undergraduates. There is frequently provision for replacing one examination by a short thesis. Masters degrees are generally by a combination of examination and thesis, while Doctorates are purely by an extended thesis. Most doctoral students complete their studies in the age range 26-28.

## 2. STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

British universities depend upon the central government for amounts of their income that vary between 60-90%. They are, within the limits of increasing central government interference in their affairs (through modulating their financial support in relation to an evaluation of research performance every four years) still autonomous but their direction is increasingly circumscribed. Politics is regarded as a low cost discipline, so it is therefore weighted unfavourably in the grants disbursed by the government. Student intake numbers are allocated by each university within an overall figure fixed by the government. Financial penalties are attached both to overshooting or undershooting the target by the Department of Education.

The Political Studies Association of the UK is the only national body representing all British political scientists, most of whom choose to belong to the P.S.A. They receive the two journals of the Association, « *Political Studies* » (five issues annually) which has a world-wide circulation of some 2,000 copies and « *Politics* » (three issues annually) which is targeted especially at graduate students but received by all P.S.A. members. The association also publishes a newsletter, « *P.S.A. News* », for all members. In addition to holding an annual conference (attended by about 400 participants who take part in numerous specialist workshops extending over 3 days each April) and regular meetings of Heads of Politics Departments, the association awards a prize for the best political science book published each year and four prizes for the best theses in the main subfields of the discipline. The annual conference is associated with a one-day conference for graduate students of politics, who have their own Graduate Network. The P.S.A. has some 30 specialist research groups, the more active of which use the annual conference to organise sessions in addition to any other meetings.

The advantage of publication in English means that the wide circulation attained by « *Political Studies* » is also reflected in its extrovert character. In a 1980 study by Jean Laponce « *Political Studies* » emerged as the least insular of the five political science journals surveyed, the others being the « *Political Science Review* », the « *Canadian Journal of Political Science* », the « *Indian Journal of Political Science* » and the « *Revue Française de Science Politique* ». The British journal was the least nationally self-centred in terms of its subject matter and in terms of its contributors. His analysis of the « sources of imports shows the United States to be by far the main supplier ; and Great Britain to be the second, far behind the United States but far ahead of any other country » (Laponce : 409 ; cf. : 404, 411). While the five journals surveyed formed « a truly international network », Laponce concluded that « two American and two British journals (« *Political Studies* » and the « *British Journal of Political Science* ») have the widest international exposure, and one of them is clearly dominant : the **A.P.S.R.** » (Laponce : 407 : cf. 408). We need a repeat of this study but it is unlikely that the findings reported will have been drastically modified.

A similar pattern emerges when the location of the 39 major political science journals indexed by the « *International Political Science Abstracts* » is considered. In 1979, 46 per cent were based in the USA, 13 per cent in Britain, with no other country in double figures. Laponce also investigated another indicator of insularity : the number of paper givers at International Political Science Association congresses from 1973-85. If we set aside the 1979 Moscow congress, which was « boycotted » by some British political scientists, the UK accounted for 6.4 per cent in 1973 (Montreal), 8.1 per cent in 1976 (Edinburgh), 3.8 per cent in 1982 (Rio) and 6.8 per cent in 1985 (Paris), usually being among the top three or four (Laponce, 1988 : 62). Clearly, these various indicators suggest that Britain is the home of one of the most extrovert and active political science communities, often second only to its very much larger American counterpart. Its prominence and activity within the European Consortium for Political Research simply underlines this assessment. Might the perception of insularity derive from other characteristics of British political science : its relative imperviousness in the past to Continental Marxism and American behaviouralism?

Leaving aside many of the very numerous specialist journals, British political scientists publish the « *British Journal of Political Science* », « *British Journal of International Studies* », « *Electoral Studies* », « *Government and Opposition* », « *International Affairs* », « *Journal of Legislative Studies* », « *Journal of Public Policy* », « *Journal of Theoretical Politics* », « *Parliamentary Affairs, Policy and Politics* », « *Political Quarterly* », « *Public Administration* », « *Teaching Politics* », « *West European Politics* ». There are also several yearbooks e.g. « *British Elections and Parties Yearbook* ». Leading publishers of politics books are Blackwells (including Polity Press), Cambridge University Press, Frank Cass, Manchester University Press, Oxford University Press, Routledge. There is frequent co-publication in the USA.

### **3. CO-OPERATION**

British politics departments have distinguished themselves by their active presence in the E.C.P.R., exceeding by a large margin all other countries in their membership and participation in its activities. The Essex University Summer School is a long-standing base for E.C.P.R. training.

British political scientists have been less prominent in the activities of I.P.S.A. This may be due in part to the existence of many specialist research groups inside and outside the P.S.A., so that they are less inclined to take part in yet more general international fora. There are nevertheless links between British political scientists in many bilateral and multilateral networks, such as the British Politics Group of the American Political Science Association.

## **APPENDIX**

### **POLITICS DEPARTMENTS IN THE UK - MAILING ADDRESSES**

#### **ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY**

Department of Politics and International Relations, Dunbar Street, Old Aberdeen, AB9 2TY

#### **BATH UNIVERSITY**

School of Social Science, Claverton Down, Bath, BA2 7AY

#### **BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY**

Department of Political Science and International Studies, Faculty of Commerce and Social Science, Muirhead Tower, Ring Road North, Birmingham, B15 2TT

#### **BRADFORD UNIVERSITY**

Department of European Studies, West Yorkshire, BD7 1DP

#### **BRISTOL UNIVERSITY**

Politics Department, 12 Priory Road, Bristol, BS8 1TU

#### **BRUNEL UNIVERSITY**

Department of Government, Uxbridge Middlesex, UB8 3PH

#### **CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY**

Department of Social and Political Sciences, Free School Lane, Cambridge, CB2 3RQ

#### **CENTRAL ENGLAND UNIVERSITY, BIRMINGHAM**

Department of Law, Perry Bar, Birmingham, B42 2SU

#### **CENTRAL LANCASHIRE UNIVERSITY**

Department of Public Policy, Preston, PR1 2HE

#### **CITY UNIVERSITY**

Department of Social Science, Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB

#### **COVENTRY UNIVERSITY**

School of International Studies and Law, Priory Street, Coventry, CV1 5FB

#### **DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY, LEICESTER**

Department of Public Policy and Managerial Studies, Scraftoft Campus, Scraftoft, Leicester, LE79SU

#### **DUNDEE UNIVERSITY**

Department of Political Science and Social Policy, The University, Dundee, DD1 4HN

#### **DURHAM UNIVERSITY**

Department of Politics, 48 Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3LZ

#### **EAST ANGLIA UNIVERSITY**

School of Economic and Social Studies ; School of Development, Norwich, NR7 7TJ

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, 31 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh, EH8 9JT

Europa Institute, Old College, South Bridge, Edinburgh, EH8

ESSEX UNIVERSITY

Department of Government, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ

EXETER UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter, EX4 4RJ

GLAMORGAN UNIVERSITY

The Business School, Public Administration Division, Pontypridd, Glamorgan, CF37 1DL

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Sciences ; Department of Law and Public Administration, Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow,

G4 0BA

GLASGOW UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Glasgow, G12 8RT

GREENWICH UNIVERSITY

Politics Division, School of Humanities, Wellington Street, Woolwich, SE18 6PF

HERTFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY

Division of Social Sciences, College Lane Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 9AB

HUDDERSFIELD UNIVERSITY

Division of Politics and Philosophy, School of Music and Humanities, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

HULL UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Hull, HU6 7RX

KEELE UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG

KENT UNIVERSITY

Politics and International Relations, The University, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NP

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

School of Social Science, Penrhyn Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT1 2EE

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics and International Relations, Lancaster, LA1 4YL

LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Business, Public Policy and Administrative Division, 43 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2 8BW

LEEDS UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Leeds, LS2 9JT

LEICESTER UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, University Road, Leicester, LE1 7RH  
Centre for the Study of Public Order, 6 Salisbury Road, Leicester, LE1 7QR

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Politics and Administration, School of Social Sciences, Trueman Street Building, 15-21 Webster Street,  
Liverpool, L3 2ET

LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY

School of Politics and Communication Studies, Roxby Building, PO Box 147, Liverpool, L69 3BX

LONDON GUILDHALL UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics and Modern History, Calcutta House, Old Castle Street, London, E1 7NT

LONDON UNIVERSITY/ BIRBECK COLLEGE

Department of Politics and Sociology, Birbeck College, 10 Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HX

LONDON UNIVERSITY : GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE

New Cross, London, SE14 6NW

LONDON UNIVERSITY : INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HP

LONDON UNIVERSITY : INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL

LONDON UNIVERSITY : INSTITUTE OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

31 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HA

LONDON UNIVERSITY : KING'S COLLEGE

Department of War Studies, Strand, London, WC2R 2LS

LONDON UNIVERSITY : LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Department of Government ; Department of International Relations, Houghton Street, London, WC21 2AE

LONDON UNIVERSITY : QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD

Department of Political Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS

LONDON UNIVERSITY : ROYAL HOLLOWAY

Department of History, Royal Holloway and Bedford new College, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey

LONDON UNIVERSITY : SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES

Thornhaugh Square, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG

LONDON UNIVERSITY : SCHOOL OF SLAVONIC AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

Senate House, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU

LONDON UNIVERSITY : UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT

LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY  
Department of European Studies  
Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
Department of Political Science, Chatham Undercroft Building, Manchester, M15 6BR

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY  
Department of Government, Dover Street, Manchester, M13 9PL

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY  
School of History and Political Studies  
White Hart Lane, London, N17 8HR

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Politics, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 7RU

NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY  
Department of Economics and Government, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 8ST

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY  
Department of Economics and Public Administration, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU

NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
Department of Politics, The Orchards, University Park, Nottingham, ND7 2RD

OPEN UNIVERSITY  
Government and Politics Discipline, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY  
Oxford, OX3 0BP

OXFORD UNIVERSITY  
Oxford, OX1 2JD

OXFORD UNIVERSITY : NUFFIELD COLLEGE  
Oxford, OX1 1NF

OXFORD UNIVERSITY : ST ANTHONY'S COLLEGE  
Oxford, OX1 2JD

PAISLEY UNIVERSITY  
Politics Section, Department of Applied Social Studies, High Street, Paisley, PA1 2BE

PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY  
Department of Applied Social Science, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA

PORTSMOUTH UNIVERSITY  
Department of Politics, Milldam, Burnaby Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire, PO1 3AS

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Department of Politics, University Road, Belfast, BT7 1NN

READING UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 2AA

THE ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

School of Public Administration and Law, 352 King Street, Aberdeen, AB9 2TQ

ST ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

department of International Relations, Fife, KY16 9AL

SALFORD UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics and Contemporary History, Salford, M5 4WT

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

Business School, Public Sector Management Group, Dyson House, Pond Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB

SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Sheffield, S10 2TN

SOUTHAMPTON UNIVERSITY

Department of Politics, Southampton, SO9 5NH

SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY

Division of Politics, Area of Legal, Political and Social sciences, 103 Borough Street, London, SE1 0AA

STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY

Department of International Relations and Politics, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DE

STRATHCLYDE UNIVERSITY

Department of Government, McCance Building, 16 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XQ

SUNDERLAND UNIVERSITY

Department of Social and International Studies, Douro Terrace, Sunderland, SR2 7DX

SURREY UNIVERSITY

Department of Linguistics and International Studies, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 5XH

SUSSEX UNIVERSITY

Politics Subject Group, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9QN

TEESIDE UNIVERSITY

School of Human Studies, Middlesborough, Cleveland, TS1 3BA

THAMES VALLEY UNIVERSITY

School of European and International Studies, St Mary's Road, Ealing, London, W5 5RF

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Department of Public Administration and Legal Studies, Newtonabbey, Co Antrim, BT37 0QB

Department of Philosophy and Politics, Coleraine, BT52 1SA

**WALES-ABERYSTWYTH**

Department of International Politics, University College Aberystwyth, Llandinam Building, Penglais, Aberystwyth, SY23 3DB

**WALES-CARDIFF**

Politics Section, School of European Studies, University of Wales College of Cardiff, PO Box 908, Cardiff CF1 3YQ

**WALES-SWANSEA**

Department of Political Theory and Government, University College of Swansea, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP

**WARWICK UNIVERSITY**

Department of Politics and International Studies, Coventry, CV4 7AL

**WEST ENGLAND UNIVERSITY, BRISTOL**

School of Politics, Coldharbour Lane, Frenchay, Bristol, BS16 1QY

**WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY**

School of Social and Policy Studies, 70 Great Portland Street, London, W1R 8AL

**WOLVERHAMPTON UNIVERSITY**

Politics Division, Castleview, Dudley, DY1 3HR

**WORCESTER COLLEGE**

Division of Social Science, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AT

**YORK UNIVERSITY**

Department of Politics, Heslington, York, YO1 5DD

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## RESUME

La science politique britannique reflète l'ancrage culturel et la fonction de soutien de l'Etat qui ont trop fréquemment caractérisé une bonne part de la science politique en général. Si l'existence d'une forte tradition nationale permet de résister à l'importation en bloc et sans distance critique d'approches étrangères avec leur bagage d'hypothèses, elle a engendré une répugnance traditionnelle de la science politique britannique à se considérer comme faisant partie d'une discipline de dimension mondiale.

Le pourcentage de personnel universitaire employé en science politique a en fait décliné de 2,1 en 1966 à 1,7 en 1977 et, en termes de taille relative, ce domaine demeure une discipline universitaire mineure, comprenant au total 1338 personnes en 1993. La période de coupes sauvages dans le budget universitaire s'est traduite par une chute dramatique d'environ 15% entre 1981 et 1991 dans le nombre de politologues ayant un poste universitaire. La modification du recrutement en direction des contrats à durée déterminée et au détriment des emplois permanents signifie qu'un politologue sur 5 est employé à titre temporaire.

En termes de distribution par sous-disciplines, l'étude des institutions politiques demeure importante tandis que les études sur le système britannique (*British politics*) ont connu une chute significative, indiquant un déclin de l'esprit de clocher. Il s'est également produit une modeste érosion d'autres sous-disciplines importantes : études politiques comparées, théorie politique, administration publique, politique locale, qui étaient traditionnellement au premier plan en Grande-Bretagne. Les enseignements de politique africaine et américaine ont également décliné tandis que les relations internationales ont connu une sensible expansion. La modeste croissance relative des études ouest-européennes cache l'importance croissante de celles portant sur l'Union Européenne aussi bien au niveau du premier cycle (*undergraduate*) que du deuxième (*postgraduate*), tandis que les études est-européennes ont, elles, bénéficié d'un essor plus significatif.

A la suite de l'élévation des *Polytechnics* au rang d'universités (certains diraient plutôt que la plupart des universités ont été financièrement rétrogradées au rang de *Polytechnics*) il y a maintenant 87 institutions universitaires où la science politique est enseignée. Cela va des départements ayant plus de 50 spécialistes (LSE, Manchester, Oxford) à d'autres, nombreux, disposant seulement d'une poignée de politologues. L'enseignement des études politiques prend la forme soit d'un diplôme spécialisé (qui, à la différence de l'Europe continentale, n'a pas de lien traditionnel avec les études de droit) soit d'un diplôme pluridisciplinaire avec une ou deux autres matières. Les diplômes pluridisciplinaires combinent fréquemment les études politiques avec l'économie, l'histoire, le droit, la philosophie et la sociologie. La durée d'un premier cycle (*undergraduate BA*) est habituellement de trois ans mais est communément allongée à 4 ans quand ils est combiné avec l'étude d'une langue étrangère. Les deuxièmes cycles (*Masters*) sanctionnés par un examen (MA, MSc) sont généralement enseignés sur une année. Les doctorats sont supposés prendre 3 à 4 ans mais cela varie selon que l'étudiant a fait ou non un travail préliminaire sous la forme d'un mémoire pour un MA ou un MPhil.

En raison principalement d'une stricte sélection à l'entrée, le taux d'échec parmi les étudiants en science politique est très bas et la plupart des étudiants de premier cycle atteignent leur diplôme en trois ans, entre 18 et 22 ans. Seule une petite minorité d'étudiants poursuivent en deuxième cycle, en partie parce que les frais de scolarité sont élevés et ne sont pas payés par les autorités locales comme c'est généralement le cas pour le premier cycle. Les maîtrises (*Masters*) sont

habituellement terminées en une ou deux années, après quoi se produit une nouvelle réduction des effectifs d'étudiants qui poursuivent en troisième cycle (*doctoral studies*). En extrapolant à partir du ratio enseignants/étudiants et en gardant à l'esprit que ces derniers peuvent faire la totalité ou seulement la moitié ou le tiers de leurs études en science politique, on peut estimer le nombre d'étudiants dans cette discipline à environ 15000, nombre très modeste qui contraste avec les pays où les universités ont une politique de recrutement moins sévère.

**Structure et organisation** : les universités britanniques dépendent du gouvernement central pour une part de leurs ressources qui varie entre 60% et 90%. Elles sont toujours autonomes mais avec une marge de manoeuvre de plus en plus réduite. Les études politiques sont considérées comme une discipline à faible coût et de ce fait sont défavorisées dans les dotations gouvernementales. Le nombre d'étudiants admis est ventilé par université à l'intérieur d'un nombre total fixé par le gouvernement.

L'Association des Etudes Politiques du Royaume-Uni (P.S.A.) est le seul organisme représentant l'ensemble des politologues britanniques, dont la plupart sont membres de la P.S.A. Ils reçoivent les deux revues de l'Association, « *Political Studies* » et « *Politics* », lequel est destiné plus particulièrement aux étudiants diplômés mais est reçu par tous les membres de P.S.A. Lors de son congrès annuel (environ 400 participants qui prennent part à de nombreux ateliers de spécialistes pendant 3 jours tous les ans en avril) se tient en parallèle un *workshop* d'une journée pour les étudiants diplômés en science politique, qui ont leur propre réseau de diplômés (*Graduate Network*). La P.S.A. a quelque 40 groupes de spécialistes, dont les plus actifs utilisent la conférence annuelle pour organiser des sessions en plus des autres réunions.

**Coopération** : la Grande-Bretagne abrite l'une des communautés en science politique les plus ouvertes et les plus actives qui soient, au deuxième rang derrière son homologue américaine, beaucoup plus importante. Les départements d'études politiques britanniques se sont distingués par leur présence active au sein de l'E.C.P.R., dépassant les autres pays en nombre de membres et en participation aux activités. L'Université d'été d'Essex est de longue date un pilier de la formation E.C.P.R.

Les politologues britanniques ont été moins en vue dans les activités de l'I.P.S.A. Ceci est peut-être dû en partie à l'existence de 40 groupes de spécialistes à l'intérieur et d'autres à l'extérieur de la P.S.A., de sorte qu'ils sont moins enclins à participer à des forums internationaux plus généraux. Il y a cependant des liens entre les politologues britanniques et de nombreux réseaux bilatéraux et multilatéraux.

