

Political Studies in British Universities

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In recent years the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom (PSA) has been concerned to monitor the impact of educational cuts on political studies in British universities and polytechnics. Accordingly in 1986 the executive decided to establish a data base of the profession that would provide a systematic analysis of staff, students, and departments.

The PSA has just published a report, *Political Studies in the Eighties* by Hugh Berrington (Newcastle University) and Pippa Norris (Newcastle Polytechnic), which summarizes the results of this research.

The report concludes that in universities and polytechnics in the UK there are approximately 1,000 staff and over 4,500 undergraduate and postgraduate students in departments of political science. Over the last decade there have been positive trends in student demand, performance and employment. All the indicators suggest there has been a substantial increase in demand among students for politics degrees. Since 1981 the number of applicants for polytechnic and university places has increased by 20 to 25 percent. The evidence also suggests that there has been stronger demand among employers for politics graduates. Over the last decade there has been a marked improvement in the proportion of politics graduates entering permanent employment. Politics graduates have adapted well to changes in the labour market, competing successfully for

careers in commerce, finance, industry and public administration. The highest proportion of politics graduates are now absorbed by the commercial sector reflecting the expansion of the service sector in banking, accountancy, and insurance.

Nevertheless despite these positive trends it is clear that the profession is facing serious problems as a result of reductions in higher education since the early eighties. The results of the research indicate that there has been a gradual but continuous erosion of staffing which has had a significant impact over time. The surveys suggest that since 1981 staff in political studies have been reduced at an estimated rate of 1.4% to 1.5% per annum. If this trend continues, it suggests the loss of 14% to 15% over the decade, that is, the loss of one in seven political scientists. Part of this loss can be attributed to British political scientists transferring to universities in the United States.

This is the most serious problem facing the profession although related issues include the lack of new appointments, the shift from permanent to temporary work, the increased teaching loads, the minimal opportunities for lateral transfer between British institutions, the proposed abolition of tenure and the decline in morale within the profession. Unless these serious problems are addressed the report concludes that political studies faces an uncertain future.

Copies of the report are available from Hugh Berrington, Department of Politics, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, England (free of charge). The data base has also produced a *Directory of Political Studies (1987/88)*, which lists over 1,000 staff in British departments. This is also available on request.

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