

## DIVERSE VOICES PETITION – RESPONSE FROM TRUSTEES

A petition was recently instigated regarding the PSA's [Diverse Voices Scholarship initiative](#). The PSA's trustees and staff are very open to contact and feedback, and we welcome suggestions for improvement in any of our areas of activity. But there is much about this petition that is puzzling or troubling.

Much of the content of the petition is inaccurate, and people who have signed it in good faith have been substantially misinformed. We explain why below.

Point b in the petition states the following:

*"b. In 2018 and 2019, PSA Trustees set aside portions of the Annual Budget for the Diverse Voices Doctoral Scholarship, amounting to a total of £50,000. In 2019, the publication contract with SAGE specifically guaranteed £30,000 for the Diverse Voices Doctoral Scholarship, with another £70,000 guaranteed for the Doctoral Scholarship if arrangements were put in place for Political Insight to be online only by January 2023. This was confirmed in the 2020 AGM Chair's Report and in the PSA Financial Report, dated 31st December 2019."*

Much of this statement is simply untrue, or highly misleading.

We can find no evidence to support the first sentence of point b. There is no record in the Annual Report and Accounts for either 2018 or 2019 that indicates that any specific reserves (i.e. £25k or £50k) had been ring-fenced for the purpose of Diverse Voices. Page 7 of the 2018 Report and Accounts states that we will set up the Diverse Voices scholarships, but there is no mention in the document of how much or where the funds will come from. The 2019 Report and Accounts state (on page 14) that we will create a Diverse Voices fund in 2020, but does not specify a figure. The 2020 Report and Accounts mention the £30k from Sage Publishing, which is then budgeted for in 2021, 2022 and 2023 at £10k spend per year. There is nothing in the 2020 accounts, or those for any other year, about an additional £50k. Our staff and trustees have not been able to find any records anywhere, including in the minutes of all Executive Committee meetings across this time period or in the 2020 AGM Chair's Report, of this sum.

Were the first sentence of point b in the petition to be correct, it would mean that £50k had gone missing from our finances, and that this had entirely escaped the notice of staff, trustees and our auditors for several years. It would also mean that the previous Chair would have signed off on, presented to the AGM, and submitted to the Charities Commission, accounts for the association that failed to document properly a significant financial commitment. We have no evidence whatsoever that this is the case.

The statement in point b of the petition about our Political Insight publication is also highly misleading. Political Insight, we should recall, is an important means of disseminating the work of many of our members to an audience that extends well beyond academia. The magazine is also a core part of our offer to our Schools, Undergraduate and Public members. Our contract with Sage provides for a one-off payment from them of £70,000 if they cease to publish it. In such circumstances Sage would *not* support online publishing of the magazine. Our investigations have indicated that finding alternative means of online publishing to a similar standard would mean an additional annual cost of approximately £35,000. So, unless the decision were taken to cease publishing Political Insight altogether, within about two years any gains from ceasing the print publication would have been totally absorbed by the additional costs, which would then be ongoing.

We received £30,000 from Sage on the agreement of our new contract with them (2020–25) which has been earmarked for Diverse Voices scholarships and other aspects of our Diverse Voices programme. The PSA has created a designated fund in its reserves for the Diverse Voices programme which is where this £30,000 'sits', and can be enhanced with additional PSA reserves, donations or other external funding. Sage have been kept fully apprised of our work on Diverse Voices and been very supportive of the launch. The Executive Committee has agreed a package of investment of approximately £10k in 2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively which funds three scholarships (and on-costs such as support to mentors) per year as well as the other work we will develop in this area.

Our Annual Reports and Accounts for all recent years are publicly available documents. Members are invited to consult them and verify for themselves much of what we have said above. The reports and accounts can be found [HERE](#).

In addition to financial matters, there is another point in the petition which needs to be corrected. Point h in the petition states:

*h. The PSA has not reached out to the Women and Politics or Race, Migration and Intersectionality specialist groups for input about the initiative.*

This statement, at least as regards recent practice, is incorrect.

The previous Chair of the PSA engaged with some external stakeholders, including one of the current co-convenors of the Race, Migration and Intersectionality (RMI) group, in a Chair's Commission on DV, which met once in February 2019.

The current Executive Committee has a trustee dedicated to EDI matters. Once the Executive, at its meeting of June 2021, confirmed the broad parameters of work in this area that it believed to be sustainable, it tasked its newly-established EDI Working Group, chaired by this trustee, with developing the detailed plans. The EDI lead trustee reached out to the convenors of the RMI group by email on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021, requesting that they nominate someone to become a member of the Working Group. The RMI group nominated one of their group co-convenors to participate in our Working Group, who was then fully involved in discussions within the Working Group over the following months about the shape of the Diverse Voices scholarships, and other aspects of the Diverse Voices programme. The final proposals to emerge from the Working Group were then discussed and approved by the PSA Executive Committee.

We should perhaps also add that the Diverse Voices fund is offering partial financial support for the following events involving RMI and W&P members:

- 11 May: [At the Intersections | The Political Studies Association \(PSA\)](#)
- 16 June: [BISA and PSA Workshop: Gender, race and the intersections of precarity | The Political Studies Association \(PSA\)](#)

Our EDI lead trustee is intending to attend both events and will be happy to discuss the Diverse Voices scholarships and programme further with all participants.

### **Other Points in the Petition**

There are other aspects of the petition which are not inaccurate but to which we would like to respond:

*a. The scholarship does not include a PhD stipend for living expenses as would be expected with a PhD scholarship, or even funding towards tuition fees. Instead, this grant includes one year's free PSA Membership (which is a £20 fee for early career researchers) and up to £500 pounds to cover research-related expenses. This is severely less than an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) three-year PhD studentship, which for the year 2021/22 includes a standard maintenance grant of £15,609 and £4,500 towards tuition fees (per academic year), as well as research and fieldwork expenses. The ESRC stipend is widely matched by PhD scholarships offered by Politics departments in higher education institutions.*

This is broadly correct. The PSA DV scholarship does not seek to emulate the scholarships provided by individual universities, Doctoral Training Partnerships and other postgraduate funders. It is correct that the PSA ECN Membership is currently £20 a year – however, it is possible this fee will change in the future. We should note that this membership is in effect highly subsidised by the PSA as a whole (because supporting those early in their career is a strategic priority for the PSA), and it provides hundreds of pounds worth of benefit and priceless opportunities to develop and further the members' career.

The broader point relevant here is that, in the context of its diminishing income, the PSA does not remotely have the resources available to sustain a significant number of fees-and-maintenance scholarships for PhD students. Any attempt to launch a scheme on this basis, or even on the basis of partial PhD funding, would only be able to help very small numbers of students and likely operate for a very short period of time. It would be fundamentally at odds with the legal duty of trustees to launch a scheme that they knew was not

financially sustainable. But even more importantly, given the gravity of the issues that we are seeking to address, it would be morally indefensible for us to launch a scheme that made a pretence at addressing such issues while knowing that the scheme would almost certainly have to fold within very short order for lack of sustainable finance.

We have therefore chosen to try to develop a programme of work that can be sustainable, and which we very much hope will be developed and enhanced over time by future trustees of the PSA.

*c. The initiative includes funding for all expenses covered attendance at the PSA's Annual Conference in 2023 as well as mentoring and networking opportunities. The PSA already consistently offers grants to help early career researchers attend the Annual Conference, including covering conference fees and travel expenses, while mentoring and networking opportunities is [sic] already offered by the PSA to Early Career Network members.*

It is correct that the scholarship covers the costs of attending PSA conference – the delegate fee, accommodation and travelling expenses, which constitutes hundreds of pounds in expenses. In previous years, the PSA offered £50 grants for up to 100 ECN members to help them to attend conference. This is no longer the case: instead, the PSA subsidises the delegate fee to keep it as low as possible so that many more ECN members can benefit.

On mentoring: although the PSA and ECN do already provide members with networking and mentoring opportunities, no denigration to that very valuable work is intended when we say that what we are envisaging for the Diverse Voices Scholarships is on a very different scale. We will be aiming to fast-track the professional development and disciplinary socialisation of a cohort of scholars, and the mentoring envisaged will include sustained engagement over the whole year with senior figures in the PSA and the discipline as a whole.

There is again a broader point here. If we conceive of, and measure, the support we can give to the scholars that this scheme aims to support purely in terms of finance, then the PSA is not likely to ever be able to do much to help many people. But while we have limited finances, we are much richer in other things – people, networks and disciplinary connections. If we can develop ways to leverage the latter effectively, we can realistically hope to help far more students and ultimately make a more substantial contribution towards changing the culture of our discipline.

*d. Offering the grant to ethnic minority students who are already registered for a PhD and in their second or final year does not address the serious pipeline issues in our discipline that there are very few British ethnic minority students to begin with who are registered for a PhD in Politics or International Relations.*

*e. This initiative does not address the lack of ethnic minority students on Politics or International Relations PhD programmes which means PhD recruitment must be a priority, especially as the lack of ethnic diversity in Political Studies as a discipline and unequal outcomes for ethnic minority students and staff is well-documented. The PSA's own report (in partnership with the British International Studies Association) entitled 'Career trajectories in UK departments of politics and international relations', published in June 2021, found that Politics and International Relations as a discipline is "overwhelmingly white and predominantly male". In the 2018/19 academic year, the report found that 78% of staff in Politics and International Relations departments were white. Breakdown of ethnicity was not possible due to limitations of available data, however, a significant lack of staff especially from Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds in higher education has been established elsewhere.*

...

*The PSA's report found that 61% of all Politics staff were male and only 29% of those in senior positions were female. The report also found that staff from ethnic minorities have a higher risk than their white counterparts of exiting UK Higher education, which will only have been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic. This is not surprising given women of colour, particularly Black female academics face the intersection of racism and sexism in academia.*

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There is no shortage of challenges in this area, as the petition correctly suggests. It is clear from the 2021 PSA/BISA [report](#) by Prof Chris Hanretty (part-funded by the PSA) that there are also some serious issues later on in the career path: not only are there too few ethnic minority academics in politics and international relations; and are they more likely to quit the profession; but those who stay often do worse in terms of promotions: our discipline has a particularly poor record in terms of the proportion of ethnic minority staff that reach senior academic ranks.

How do we respond to this as the PSA? If we are to act, as we should, then we have to start somewhere; that means making some choices about where we can commit our limited resources most effectively. We have chosen, in our first stage, to try to target support to those already committed to doctoral study in our discipline. As we develop a programme of actions in this area we very much hope to be able to offer support for those at different stages – and we will continue to welcome positive and constructive proposals for how we can best achieve that.

*f. All candidates for the current PSA Trustee Elections are men which goes against the PSA's Equality and Diversity commitments.*

There were five excellent candidates in the 2022 trustee elections, who met a number of diversity criteria. However, for the important criterion of gender the all-male slate fell short. The current election process means that any PSA academic member can self-nominate for the trustee positions, and there is no provision in the PSA's bylaws for the election process to be suspended if only male candidates are nominated. It is certainly of concern that despite pro-active efforts made by Trustees to encourage female candidates, no women decided to stand this year (especially as women have tended to be more successful than their male counterparts in recent elections): this may well reflect, at least in part, the uneven impacts of Covid on work-life balance.

We take these matters seriously and try to consider them in the round. For the record, the current (April 2022) [Executive Committee](#) comprises eight women and seven men, with the PSA Chief Executive and all senior office holders except for the Chair being female. The Executive Committee is also the most diverse in the PSA's history. We are not complacent and fully recognise we still have a distance to travel. The PSA trustees are discussing what more can be done to reach and inspire women to put themselves forward, and to offer support to them once in position. This is also important ahead of the forthcoming process to find and appoint our next PSA Chair and Vice-Chair which will begin over the summer.

*g. The initiative's lack of a stipend for living expenses does not address the fact that students from working-class backgrounds are less likely to be able to afford to pursue a PhD and are priced out of doctoral study. Unequal access to higher education is compounded by ethnic inequalities as, based on pre-pandemic figures, nearly half of Black African and Black Caribbean households have been found to be living in poverty, compared with just under one in five white families, while ethnic minority families as a whole are between two and three times as likely to be in persistent poverty than white households.*

These points are, sadly, correct.

The petition concluded with some 'action points'. We will again attempt to respond to them.

*In light of the points raised above and as the PSA has taken individual donations and, by April 2020, had set aside over £80,000 to support the Diverse Voices Scholarship fund (not including the £70,000 related to the Political Insight provision), we ask that the PSA:*

*i. Provide a full account of available funds in the Diverse Voices fund.*

As explained above, the financial figures listed here are incorrect and substantially over-state the monies that were budgeted for Diverse Voices. We might add that while an appeal for individual donations was

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launched on the PSA website on 27 November 2018 and promoted at the PSA Political Awards ceremony of that year, the total sum raised by this appeal and all subsequent donations is substantially under £1,000.

One of the explicit purposes of the AGM is to discuss and approve the Annual Report and Accounts, which provides full details on the PSA's finances. That was conducted in hybrid in-person/online form this year, and some questions about the Diverse Voices programme were addressed. The Accounts and Report were then approved unanimously. If colleagues have further questions about any aspects of the association's finances, they are always welcome to contact the CEO, the Chair or the Honorary Treasurer.

*ii. Increase the provision for the Diverse Voices Scholarship to include a stipend for living expenses of at least £8000 (for 3 years) or a workable amount for the PSA in partnership with institutions.*

*iii. Increase the provision for the Diverse Voices Scholarship to include covering tuition fees for a 3-year PhD programme in a Politics and International Relations department.*

For reasons that we have already discussed, it would be wholly unsustainable for the PSA – an organisation whose main source of income has reduced substantially in recent years, and which continues to trend downwards – to make such a commitment. We are not going to launch commitments with the overwhelming likelihood that they would very soon have to be rescinded. We want to develop a programme of activities that support significant numbers of students and do so in ways that we can sustain and enhance over time.

*iv. Invite applications for the Diverse Voices Scholarship from prospective PhD students from ethnic minority backgrounds, not just those who are already registered on a PhD programme.*

There will doubtless be many learning points as we develop the Diverse Voices programme; we are not going to get everything right first time. Where in the career path we can best target the support that we are able to give will be one issue that will need to be reviewed regularly.

*v. Engage in long-term financial planning, including taking further donations, to be able to endow at least one PhD scholarship to a prospective ethnic minority PhD student, including a stipend for living expenses and coverage of tuition fees (matching ESRC 3-year studentships), on an annual basis.*

We will very happily accept donations to support and enhance our work in this area. It is precisely our long-term financial planning that has led the current Executive Committee to the decision that the PSA cannot possibly sustain a commitment to offer substantial fees-and-maintenance funding for PhD scholarships from our own resources. We can sustain a programme of other activities, which we intend to be developed and enhanced over time.

*vi. Engage in an open forum for members of the PSA via an online meeting to address our concerns raised here and how they will meet the requests in this letter.*

We did engage in open discussion with members (both in person and online) at the AGM. We are hereby further communicating with members on the issue, and we will be seeking to hold other meetings and discussions in the weeks ahead. We will be very happy to respond to constructive suggestions about how we can best engage in dialogue with members and the profession about this issue.

*Trustees of the Political Studies Association*

*11<sup>th</sup> May 2022*