

PSA Strategic Plan 2025 – 28 Consultation: How are we funded and what needs to change?

Learned societies have traditionally been funded through royalties from their academic publishing. Indeed, this makes up 75% of the PSA's income. This was complemented by scholars wanting to become members to have exclusive access to our publishing and wide range of other member benefits. Learned societies, in effect, redistributed the income from journals to support those studying, teaching, and researching Politics right across the ecosystem to ensure the discipline continued to thrive to the benefit of all.

With the changes in academic publishing, library services and increasing Open Access to research outputs, the publishing royalty income available to learned societies has fallen markedly and this trend is set to continue. Despite our wider community being highly active, having a healthy pipeline of PhD scholars and Early Career academics joining, a strong dedication to specific research networks and the cause of promoting and developing Political Studies, we are also seeing fewer people becoming paid members of the Association. We believe we have around 40% of all those working in Higher Education Politics & International Relations departments in our membership (as well as members who work in associated social science, arts, humanities, and economics departments and elsewhere) which equates to around 10% of our income. Post-pandemic, the demand for connection and events (especially in-person) is high.

The vast majority of PSA community-led events are run at low or no cost to participants. And although our flagship annual conference remains popular and successful, the logistics of holding large conferences is becoming more challenging for organisers and potential delegates as universities also experience financial pressure, and with sustainability in mind. We know that those with caring responsibilities or from underrepresented groups in our profession already find it relatively more challenging to be supported to attend conferences, events and courses and there is a risk that these will become the preserve of declining numbers of members and other scholars in the future.

Our recent work on EDI in Politics and International Relations has revealed that the underrepresentation of women and scholars from other historically marginalised groups at senior levels in academia remains stubbornly high. The nature of our available resources and expertise has made it difficult to make significant inroads in encouraging greater diversity in our student population and higher education workforce.

There is considerable change and challenge in our midst but there are also opportunities. Whether this is embracing new technology, interdisciplinary partnerships or through knowledge exchange, our association could and should be at the vanguard of innovative ways of working to create positive impact.

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