



**Political Studies
Association**



Chair's Commission *'Adding Depth'*

January 2015

Summary

The role of the Chair's Commissions on 'Adding Depth' is to examine the strategic future of the PSA in order to provide new options and new opportunities. This is based on the need to increase the visibility, professionalism and ambition of the PSA in a period of rapid change. The commission is tasked with thinking about how the PSA approaches the issue of membership services and what it actually does for members. The question being whether the PSA needs to offer a different portfolio of services in order to maximise membership benefits and to potentially open-up new income streams. In approaching this task commission members are encouraged to 'think big' and to draw upon comparative research and best-practice from other disciplines and from other learned societies beyond the UK. The commission should also engage with the broader membership of the PSA in order to canvas as many views, ideas and opinions as possible. How this is achieved is very much for the commission itself to decide but significant resources have been made available for such purposes. In terms of outputs the commission is expected to publish a final report by the end of January 2016. This will be published and will then form the focus of detailed discussions within the PSA and broader community.

Context

Matthew Flinders and Rosie Campbell were elected as Chair and Vice Chair (respectively) of the PSA on 27 June 2014. Their initial planning statement consisted of a large number of reform proposals that were each in their own ways united through an emphasis on *visibility, professionalism* and *ambition*. This programmed of reform was based on an acknowledgement that the nature and demands of higher education were changing rapidly and that, as a result, there was a need for learned societies to think more creatively about the services they offer and their client groups. At the core of this agenda was the creation of two new Chair's Commissions, one of which would focus on *'Reaching Out'* across the educational pipeline, the second – *'Adding Depth'* was tasked with thinking afresh about the services offered by the PSA to its members. The commissions were announced in November 2014 and the response from the profession was incredibly positive with applications and nominations received from a broad range of individuals. Careful thought was given to ensuring that as many sections of the academic community were represented and that non-academic insights and perspectives would be

injected into discussions. The final composition of the 'Adding Depth' commission was announced in January 2015 (see Table 1).

Table 1. 'Adding Depth' Commission Members

1. Ailsa Henderson, Edinburgh University **[Chair]**
2. Ana Juncos, Bristol University **[Vice Chair]**
3. James Sloam, Royal Holloway **[Vice Chair]**
4. Andrew Glencross, University of Stirling
5. Rosie Sheridan, Sage
6. Rob Dover, Loughborough University
7. David Boucher, Cardiff University
8. Alfred Moore, Cambridge University
9. Phil Catney, Keele University
10. Margaret Arnott, University of West of Scotland
11. Jonathan Brunert, BBC
12. Thomas Elston, Oxford University
13. Samuel Powers, Sussex University

Danielle Bailey, Secretary to the Commission

February 2015

Further Details

The aim of the Political Studies Association is to ‘promote the study of politics’ and the organization has a proud history in terms of being both a learned society for academics and an advocate of political understanding and engagement. It has pursued this focus on the promotion of the study of politics in a non-partisan way and to audiences across and beyond the United Kingdom. The aim of this Chair’s Commission is to step-back and take stock of the PSA in terms of how it works and why it does so. More specifically, it is charged with considering how the PSA might offer more to its members in terms of services, functions, training, professional support, indemnity insurance, etc. as part of a broader shift to increasing the professionalism, visibility and ambition of the discipline. The aim is to maximize the organizational impact of the PSA on its members and to increase the general esteem associated with membership. Put slightly differently, the aim is to consider how to offer such a portfolio of services and opportunities for its members that membership becomes a necessary step for anyone working within the discipline. At the moment the PSA does offer a range of services in the form of events, specialist groups, conferences, publications, training, etc. but these have never formed part of a clear and explicit strategic approach that reflects on the needs of a modern academic and whether the PSA is currently meeting these needs. Questions also surround the changing context of higher education and how learned societies support their members in terms of continuing professional development, specialized training or the various demands that fall upon academics at various stages of an academic career. How do academics stay abreast of developments within their field and where can they turn for additional advice or support? Learned societies also face the problem of balancing public and private benefits in such a way that individuals cannot secure most of the benefits of what the society does without having to become a member. *The question is therefore of whether (and how) the PSA might consider deepening and expanding the services it offers its members.* These are all questions the Commission will explore as part of its inquiry and in doing so it can utilize the funding for Focus Groups of both member and non-member academics that has already been agreed (plus the subsequent ‘Survey of the Profession’ that the focus groups will help shape). The aim, however, is not simply to attract new members - although it would be hoped and expected that this would occur as a positive outcome of this initiative – but to add new meaning and dimensions to the notion of a professional academic community.

Commission Remit

The aim of this Chair’s Commission is to consider deepening and expanding the services offered to members of the PSA in order to support and nurture a diverse and professional community of academics. Although the specific approach and methods of undertaking this inquiry will be for the Commission to decide some indicative questions include:

1. What services does the PSA offer to its members and how have these evolved over time?
2. How does the PSA monitor the need to offer more or different services to its members? How would it work with universities, research funders, the Academy of Social Sciences, research users, etc. to assess the changing professional landscape?
3. What information or data do we have about what our members want from the PSA and why non-members do not join?
4. How have other cognate learned societies (or political studies/science associations in other countries) evolved in terms of membership services?

5. Do we need to offer more specialized services for members from different backgrounds, from different sub-fields or at different stages in their career?
6. How might the Annual Conference be enhanced to add new components that complement a showcase event that brings together leading scholars from around the world?
7. How would new services fit within established on-line/off-line or UK/international dimensions of our activities?
8. How might a revised approach encompass issues concerning professional diversity and representation?
9. Are there new opportunities to maximize the institutional visibility and organizational efficiency of the PSA by thinking differently about our services?
10. What are the risks and opportunities of these options and how does the issue of services relate to the issue of different categories of membership?
11. What are the implications of offering more services *vis-à-vis* non-members and their position in the academic community?
12. Can new services deliver both teaching and research-related benefits?
13. What are the knock-on or organizational implications of possible options in terms of, for example, central capacity, strategic investments, new appointments, etc.? How would they affect the PSA Business Model?

Structure

The 'Adding Depth' will consist of ten members (Table 1, above). It will be supported by Danielle Bailey as the Commission Secretary, and Rosie Campbell will be the main 'lead & link' trustee. The Commission will be launched on 1 February 2015 and it will be expected to consult widely both on-line and off-line and to draw on an evidence base from within and beyond the UK. It will be expected to deliver its report by the end of January 2016 for consideration at the March 2016 Executive Committee meeting. (The Commission will also be invited to give an informal presentation to the Executive Committee on the current thinking and work of the inquiry at the September 2015 meeting.) The Commission has a budget of £5,000 for costs (travel, research, etc.). The final output of the 'Adding Depth' will be a formal report and a set of recommendations. Members of the Commission may also be invited to speak at specific events (Heads of Departments Conference, Annual Assembly, etc.). The Executive Committee will not be bound by the recommendations of the Commission but they will be expected to publish a formal response.

Timeline:

Jan. 2015	Commission members announced
Feb. 2015	Commission begins work
Sept. 2015	Informal Commission briefing to Executive Committee
Jan. 2016	Final Report delivered
March. 2016	Formal discussion and review by Executive Committee
April 2016	PSA Response [Annual Conference, Brighton]