



**Political Studies
Association**



Chair's Commission

'Reaching Out'

January 2015

Summary

The role of the Chair's Commissions on 'Reaching Out' 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 groups and whether it needs to adopt a broader approach to the educational pipeline in order to ensure future resilience for both the organisation and the discipline. 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 *'Reaching Out'* commission was announced in January 2015 (see Table 1).

Table 1. 'Reaching Out' Commission Members

1. Dominic Byatt, Oxford University Press **[Chair]**
2. Paul Tobin, University of York **[Vice Chair]**
3. Claire Sutherland, Durham University **[Vice Chair]**
4. Paul Cairney, University of Stirling
5. Peter Shipston, Hill House School, Doncaster
6. Felicity Matthews, University of Sheffield
7. Phil Sooben, Deputy Chief Executive of the ESRC
8. Suzanne Derks-Van Damm, University of East Anglia
9. Darren Lilleker, Bournemouth University
10. Titus Alexander, Democracy Matters
11. Carl Gladwell, St Catherine's School, Guildford
12. Joanna McKay, Nottingham Trent
13. David Wendelken, Harrow School
14. Jess Garland, Sussex University
15. Richard Kelly, Manchester Grammar School

James Ludley, Secretary to the Commission

Further Details

The aim of the Political Studies Association is to 'promote the study of politics' and the Association 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 reach-out to broader audiences in ways that maximize the organisational impact of the association in terms of the promotion of politics. At the moment the PSA produces a vast range of products (journals, magazines, blog, website, etc.), it organizes a number of major events (Annual Conference, Annual Awards Ceremony) and undertakes a range of activities with schools and colleges but questions surround whether it is really maximizing its assets in terms of visibility, membership and professional leverage. Questions also surround the changing context of higher education and how universities in the UK – both young and old – ensure buoyant student recruitment figures into political science and cognate disciplines. Questions also surround how the PSA responds to new opportunities in relation to, for example, citizenship education or the demise of the Politics Association. *The question is therefore of whether (and how) the PSA might consider widening its membership to encompass a broader range of categories.* The aim of doing so would not be to simply increase its membership figures but to actually adopt a more sophisticated approach to 'the promotion of politics' that embraces the educational pipeline from primary school pupils through to retired academics or 'public members'. Contextual factors must also be taken into account as student mobility increases and the demands of an increasingly internationalized economy change what students demand from universities. Internationalization for the PSA must therefore be thought of broadly and as incorporating activities that go far beyond academic exchanges or conference panels. How, for example, do we use the PSA 'brand' within schools and colleges to help nurture the next generation of University students? The number of undergraduates studying politics must be measured in the tens of thousands and yet how many of them will have ever heard of the PSA during their degrees? What has the Association offered them and what has it done to encourage them to consider postgraduate education? How does the PSA talk to 'multiple publics in multiple ways'?

in order to promote the study of politics? The PSA has evolved with an understandable primary focus on academic staff in higher education but in order to increase the resilience of that group (in economic, institutional and political terms) is it necessary to consider 'reaching-out' in new ways?

Commission Remit

The aim of this Chair's Commission is to consider widening the membership of the PSA in order to 'promote the study of politics' and to secure the long-term health of the discipline. The notion of the 'educational and professional pipeline' is therefore offered as the basis of a discussion concerning how the PSA maximizes the efficiency of its activities and sustains a viable business model for the future. The PSA already undertakes a range of what might be termed 'pipeline activities' – the work with schools and colleges, the Teachers' Members Group, etc. – but this has never been undertaken in a strategic or coherent manner that consider all potential PSA client groups. This could range from school aged children in relation to Citizenship Education right through to retired academics. Although the specific approach and methods of undertaking this inquiry will be for the Commission to decide some indicative questions include:

1. How has the PSA traditionally interpreted its legal objective 'to promote the development of political studies and to encourage education and the advancement of learning in the art and science of government and in other branches of the political sciences'?
2. How would this traditional interpretation 'fit' when viewed against the notion of an 'educational and professional pipeline'?
3. What are the implications of reforms that are planned for citizenship education, GCSEs and A-levels for future student applications to study politics at University?
4. What are the implications of an increasingly globalised and internationalized higher education sector for future student applications to study politics at UK universities?
5. What are the implications of the need for an increasingly cross-disciplinary approach to the solution of many of societies biggest problems?
6. What would a long-term and strategic approach look like?
7. How might a revised approach encompass issues concerning professional diversity, representation or the promotion of inter-cultural awareness?
8. How have other cognate learned societies (or political studies/science associations in other countries) evolved in terms of membership and organizational breadth?
9. Are there new opportunities to maximize the institutional visibility and organizational efficiency of the PSA by thinking differently about our members?
10. Can new services deliver both teaching and research-related benefits?
11. What are the risks and opportunities of these options and what does the available evidence and data suggest?

12. How might the PSA support or encourage the internationalization of the curriculum across higher education?

13. What are the knock-on or organizational implications of possible options in terms of, for example, annual conference attendance, on-line services, central capacity, strategic investments, new appointments, etc.? How would they affect the PSA Business Model?

Structure

The 'Reaching Out' Commission will consist of twelve members (Table 1, above). It will be supported by James Ludley 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 'Reaching Out' Commission 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]