



British Philosophical Association

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Professor Sir Howard Newby  
Vice-Chancellor  
The University of Liverpool  
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Dear Sir Howard

The British philosophical community is horrified that the University of Liverpool is considering closing its Philosophy Department.

Any university without philosophy will lack a forum for studying some of the most profound and pivotal questions. For philosophy is the discipline that addresses questions about what knowledge is, about how human beings should behave individually and collectively, about whether there are sound arguments for religious belief, about the nature of truth and beauty, about which forms of reasoning are valid, and about the underlying presuppositions of other subjects, from History to Psychology to Biology.

Thus we cannot understand how a university could increase its intellectual stature and research coherence by cutting philosophy out of its teaching and research. And our view is widely shared. Of Russell Group universities, only two (Imperial and Newcastle) have no philosophy department or equivalent unit.

There are also very concrete reasons for high expectations for philosophy in the UK generally and at Liverpool in particular. The number of students taking A-level Philosophy in the UK more than doubled between 2002 and 2007, and many of these students want to study philosophy at university. Likewise, increasingly students taking A-level Religious Studies & Ethics want to study philosophy at university. Meanwhile, demand for places from students with no philosophy background remains high. In addition, philosophy is enjoying healthy recruitment at postgraduate levels, including noticeable increases from other EU countries.

One thing the RAE showed is that research by people working in UK philosophy departments is on average extremely high. In many ways, this is hardly surprising. Every opening in a UK philosophy department attracts a huge number of applications. And, for at least another three or four years, philosophy departments will be in a 'buyer's market', and thus have opportunities to hire people with enormous promise as researchers and teachers.

As was recognised by the RAE panel and is well known by the philosophical community both within and outside the UK, members of Liverpool's Philosophy Department produce some excellent research by international standards. What the RAE result does not record, however, is the historical importance of Liverpool's Philosophy Department (for instance Stephen Clark's leading role in founding the Society for Applied Philosophy). Nor does the recent

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RAE result reflect the distinctive ways in which Liverpool's Philosophy Department currently enhances UK philosophy. For instance, the Department has strengths in important areas of philosophy that are underrepresented elsewhere in the UK (some examples: environmental philosophy, feminist philosophy, and philosophy of religion).

Moreover, the Department's recent focus on 'philosophy as a way of life', through its MA programme and recent seminar series, is an ingenious initiative, one which connects a fascinating variety of concerns and which reaches out not merely to other disciplines but to the wider community. Few topics can have more contemporary relevance than the peaceful co-existence of individuals and communities with conflicting religious and moral beliefs.

To close Liverpool's Philosophy Department would be terrible for the University and a serious loss for UK higher education more generally. It would also be an injustice to members of the Department, given the good work they have done and the promise they have for the future. For all these reasons, we urge you, in the strongest possible terms, not to close Liverpool's Philosophy Department. The Department deserves the University's support and encouragement. If it gets what it deserves, it will flourish, strengthen the University, and continue to serve the needs of the community.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Brad Hooker

President of the British Philosophical Association

And on behalf of

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