

22 March 2009

Dear Sir Howard,

We, the Heads of Philosophy at Russell Group universities, were shocked and disappointed to hear that the University of Liverpool was proposing to close its Philosophy Department. We are encouraged to hear that there will now be a review of the Department; we hope that the following considerations will be borne in mind at that stage.

Russell Group universities aim to promote cutting-edge research, foster innovation, benefit society and improve the health of the nation. Any university without a philosophy department will lack something essential to achieving these aims. Philosophy is the discipline that addresses some of the deepest and most fundamental questions, whose answers constitute the foundations of all others, including the natural sciences and medicine.

Russell Group universities are also at the forefront of the development of Higher Education Policy in the UK; support for core disciplines and for preserving breadth in the number of subjects taught should without doubt be at the heart of their mission. All but two Russell Group universities (Imperial and Newcastle) have philosophy departments or equivalent units.

The Philosophy Department at the University of Liverpool has made, and continues to make, a distinctive and important contribution to the philosophical community in the UK and worldwide. Members of the department have played a leading role in the creation of learned societies, such as the Society for Applied Ethics. They have also set up and managed ICT tools which are renowned and used across the academic world, such as, for instance, the Philosophy at Large website and the discussion list Philos-L.

The recent RAE result showed that internationally excellent research is being conducted in the department. What it does not make evident is the department's vital role in the development of areas of research (such as feminist philosophy and the philosophy of religion) which are under-represented elsewhere in the UK.

There are good reasons to believe that the Philosophy Department at Liverpool will have a bright future, if it receives the kind of institutional investment that other Russell Group Universities have bestowed on units that faced disappointing RAE results. It has buoyant student numbers and offers distinctive and innovative degree programmes, such as the new MA in Philosophy as a Way of Life.

The loss of its Philosophy Department would diminish the University of Liverpool, and be a serious loss to the UK Higher Education sector as a whole. We urge you to give it the support it needs to flourish.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Alessandra Tanesini, Head, Philosophy Research Group, University of Cardiff

And on behalf of:

Prof. Alex Miller	Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham
Prof. Samir Okasha	Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Bristol
Dr. Alex Oliver	Chair, Faculty of Philosophy Board, University of Cambridge
Prof. Andy Clark	Head, Philosophy Subject Area, University of Edinburgh
Prof. Alan Weir	Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Glasgow
Prof. David Papineau	Head, Department of Philosophy, King's College London
Prof. Steven French	Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Leeds
Prof. Richard Bradley	Head, Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method, London School of Economics
Prof. Julian Dodd	Head, Discipline Area of Philosophy, University of Manchester
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