



British Philosophical Association

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St Mary's University, Twickenham, TW1 4SX

Dear Prof. Karen Sanders,

I am writing to you as President of the British Philosophical Association, and on behalf of many Heads of Philosophy Departments and Philosophical Learned Societies (listed below). We understand that your University is considering the closure of the philosophy BA programme, thus effectively removing an entire discipline from St Mary's University's teaching portfolio.

We are not in a position to know how and why this decision has been reached. We believe that ending the philosophy programme would not only be short-sighted, but also detrimental to the very ends that St Mary's University is attempting to pursue. We recognise that it is the duty of the University's management to care for the financial wellbeing of the institution, so that it can continue and persist in its stated mission. Nevertheless, we respectfully point out that this is only one part of the University's goals. Cardinal Newman, on whose idea of a University the mission of St Mary's is based, tell us:

‘And now, if I may take for granted that the true and adequate end of intellectual training and of a University is not Learning or Acquirement, but rather, is Thought or Reason exercised upon Knowledge, or what may be called Philosophy, I shall be in a position to explain the various mistakes which at the present day beset the subject of University Education.’

(J.H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 1852, Ch 6, 'Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning')

St Mary's pro-vice Chancellor for Strategy, Professor John Charmley, understands Cardinal Newman's vision to mean that St Mary's should try to educate “the whole person, body and spirit as well as intellect”, and it is in this sense that a philosophical education directly and precisely contributes to Cardinal Newman's and St Mary's conception of education. Philosophy addresses questions that continue to be central to our understanding of the world and our place within it. The core aim of any flourishing university should be the pursuit of knowledge; but philosophy is unique in addressing the question of what knowledge itself is. It also considers – amongst other things – how human beings should behave, both individually and collectively; the nature of truth and beauty; and the principles of sound reasoning. In short, a university without a fully-fledged Philosophy programme is a university that misses the chance to encourage and teach some of the most profound and important questions that human beings are capable of asking.

St Mary's can be justifiably proud to offer a programme to students in which religious faith can be brought into dialogue with Philosophy in a context of academic scholarship. This is

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especially the case given the impending closure of Heythrop College, which, like St Mary's, has been home to separate philosophy and theology programmes that nevertheless manage to bring both subjects together into fruitful exchange.

The Philosophy programme at St Mary's may well be small, but it is not less important for its size. Small programmes can still deliver the important parts of an education that a University should cherish; their value should not be directly measured by the numbers of enrolments, since Philosophy modules will consistently be popular as electives for students across the university. The UK is experiencing a national drop in student applications generally, but the number of applicants to Philosophy at St Mary's is outperforming the national position of an overall 5.0% decrease in applicants.

The Philosophy programme is known among students and applicants for teaching through discussion and dialogue, and for giving students the opportunity to explore questions in depth and develop their skill at argument and analysis. A small programme, it is able to offer students individual support as well as innovative teaching. The programme scores high in student satisfaction and runs a successful Royal Institute of Philosophy lecture series, which we understand is regularly attended in numbers by the local community.

Professor Charmley has also said: "I never yet met a student or an academic who thought that a university education was just about getting a good degree, and you don't have to be religious to know that there is more to life than 'getting on'. If we want to live in a good society and to be part of one, we have to help build it." Philosophy at St Mary's is home to many Widening Participation students from a wide variety of backgrounds who will go on to do important things in the world, precisely because they have been able to pursue a course which permits and encourages us all to recognise that there is more of value in ourselves and the world than narrowly economic interests dictate.

Philosophy is a thriving discipline in the UK, with very healthy recruitment at undergraduate and postgraduate levels so long as there is a widespread commitment within the University to ensuring that these courses are visible and promoted. We think the future for philosophy programmes look very good, and that it is very much in your University's interests to keep this one open. The job market for academic philosophers is highly competitive, allowing all philosophy departments to attract staff with excellent research and teaching credentials in the long term.

No university should reasonably make the decision to end its philosophy provision without having exhausted all the alternatives. We therefore urge you in the strongest possible terms to instigate a full-scale and wide-ranging review of the University's recent commitments to its Philosophy programme, in order to gain a thorough and well-evidenced understanding of the current situation, how it has come about, and the prospects for financial viability in the longer term.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Robert Stern
President, British Philosophical Association

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