



British Philosophical Association

admin@bpa.ac.uk
www.bpa.ac.uk

Tuesday, 18 December 2018

The British Philosophical Association understands that the University of Hull has now suspended recruitment to Philosophy Joint Honours programmes within the Faculty of Arts, Cultures, and Education and there still exists some uncertainty about the Philosophy Single Honours programme. We are concerned at the continued threat of removing this entire discipline from its teaching and subsequently its research portfolio.

This is a momentous decision that deserves serious reflection; philosophy has been taught at Hull since the inception of the University in 1928, and the department continues to be a key contributor to philosophical research in the UK and internationally. We understand that no independent review of this unit has been conducted; that the University Statutes have not been respected; that the financial case for closure has not been rigorously made, and that the proposal is being made on the basis of claims about the value and potential of studying a philosophy degree that have not been fully discussed with – and are disputed by – the Philosophy department at Hull and by the BPA and other national and international bodies. We strongly urge the University to reconsider this course of action.

The undersigned heads of department and subject leaders in Philosophy support the BPA's request that the University of Hull engage in a dialogue with us, as the national subject association, about the future of its Philosophy programmes, and that the University provides a timetable and roadmap for a full process of consultation and interdependent review.

In our view there is robust evidence of the value of Philosophy as a discipline to those who study it, to interdisciplinary research, and to public and community engagement. We would welcome an opportunity to share data about student numbers, attainment levels and career outcomes in the discipline. Instead of being a narrowly vocational qualification, philosophy degrees equip students with a wide range of highly-valued and sought-after skills, and there is compelling evidence that graduate employers have a high regard for philosophy degree-holders; the Times Graduate Destinations for 2017 leavers (based on DLHE data) reports 71.2% positive destinations for the subject. We think the future for philosophy programmes looks very good, and that it is very much in the University of Hull's interests to keep this one open.

The decision to withdraw from a discipline is hard to reverse and needs to be made in the light of a strong grasp of both the short-term and the long-term consequences. This is something that needs deep knowledge of how the subject functions across the sector, which we are happy to provide. In contrast, the effects of the University's current approach to its Philosophy department may well prove to be even more harmful, in ways that the BPA has seen in previous cases. Few people are happy to work in an institution that makes short-term but damaging decisions in this way, and the University may find that its other best academic staff seek employment elsewhere; and of course recruitment of world-class staff in the future may also prove to be difficult.

We urge the University of Hull 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, the subject's future at Hull. There are many senior and experienced academics in the discipline who would be happy to serve as external advisors on such a review and the BPA are happy to facilitate any such consultation.

President:
Prof. Robert Stern
Philosophy
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
S3 7QB
r.stern@shef.ac.uk

Director:
Dr Joe Morrison
Philosophy
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast
BT7 1PN
j.morrison@qub.ac.uk

Treasurer:
Prof. Stella Sandford
Humanities
Kingston University
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT1 2EE
S.Sandford@kingston.ac.uk

We now request assurances that the University of Hull will follow its own policies and will hold a full, open, transparent and independent review before this situation proceeds any further, and before it initiates any changes to the detriment of the Philosophy programmes and their ability to recruit students. We politely request that the University sends information about the timeline that it foresees for this process of review taking place, and hope that the University takes up the BPA's offer to be involved in this review.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Robert Stern and Professor Fiona Macpherson
Current and incoming Presidents of the British Philosophical Association

Professor Chris Daly
Head of Department of Philosophy,
University of Manchester.

Professor Bill Brewer
Head of Department of Philosophy,
King's College London.

Professor Sophie Gibb
Head of the Philosophy Department,
Durham University.

Dr Ben Colburn
Head of Philosophy,
University of Glasgow.

Dr Mark Cain
Programme Lead for Philosophy,
Oxford Brookes University.

Dr Ullrich M. Haase
Head of Philosophy,
Manchester Metropolitan University.

Dr Andrew Fisher
Head of the Department of Philosophy,
University of Nottingham.

Professor Samir Okasha FBA
Head of Philosophy Department,
University of Bristol.

Professor Fabienne Peter
Head of Department of Philosophy,
University of Warwick.

Dr Nick Treanor
Head of Philosophy,
University of Edinburgh.

Professor Nicholas Davey
Head of Philosophy,
University of Dundee.

Professor Rosanna Keefe
Head of Department of Philosophy,
University of Sheffield.

President:
Prof. Robert Stern
Philosophy
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
S3 7QB
r.stern@shf.ac.uk

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Belfast
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j.morrison@qub.ac.uk

Treasurer:
Prof. Stella Sandford
Humanities
Kingston University
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT1 2EE
S.Sandford@kingston.ac.uk

Professor Michael Hauskeller
Head of Department, Philosophy,
University of Liverpool.

Dr Joe Morrison
Subject Lead, Philosophy,
Queen's University Belfast.

Dr Alison Ainley
Head of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Anglia Ruskin University.

Dr Todd S. Mei
Head of Philosophy,
University of Kent.

Dr Jussi Suikkanen
Head of Department, Philosophy,
University of Birmingham.

Professor Daniel Whiting
Head of Philosophy,
University of Southampton.

Dr David Rose
Head of Philosophical Studies,
Newcastle University.

Professor Helen Steward
Deputy Head of School, School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science,
University of Leeds.

Professor Michael Wheeler
Head of Division of Law and Philosophy,
University of Stirling.

Professor James Tartaglia
Philosophy Programme Director,
Keele University.

Dr Robert Northcott
Head of Department of Philosophy,
Birkbeck, University of London.

Professor Alan Thomas
Head of Department,
University of York.

Professor Meena Dhandu
Course Leader Philosophy,
University of Wolverhampton

Dr Yasemin J. Erden
Acting Subject Lead, Philosophy,
St Mary's University, Twickenham.

Professor Tim Thornton
Philosophy Lead,
University of Central Lancashire.

President:
Prof. Robert Stern
Philosophy
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
S3 7QB
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Philosophy
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Treasurer:
Prof. Stella Sandford
Humanities
Kingston University
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT1 2EE
S.Sandford@kingston.ac.uk

Prof Maximilian de Gaynesford
Head of Department, Philosophy,
The University of Reading.

Dr Beth Lord
Head of Philosophy,
University of Aberdeen.

Dr Timo Jütten
Head of the School of Philosophy and Art History,
University of Essex.

Professor Jonathan Webber
Head of Philosophy,
Cardiff University.

Dr Russell Re Manning
Religions, Philosophies, and Ethics,
Bath Spa University.

Dr Anthony Booth
Head of Department of Philosophy,
University of Sussex.

Professor Bob Brecher
Director, Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics,
University of Brighton.

Professor Peter Osborne
Director, Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy
Kingston University.

Dr Brendan Larvor
Head of Philosophy,
The University of Hertfordshire.

Dr Manuel Dries
Head of Philosophy,
The Open University.

Professor Harry G West
Head of Dept of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology,
University of Exeter.

Dr Esther McIntosh
Director of Theology and Religious Studies,
York St. John University

Professor James Harris
Head of Philosophy,
The University of St Andrews.

President:
Prof. Robert Stern
Philosophy
University of Sheffield
Sheffield
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