



British Philosophical Association

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Friday, 26 June 2020

Professor Steve West, Vice Chancellor, UWE  
Professor Amanda Coffey, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, UWE  
Dr Marc Griffiths, Executive Dean and Pro Vice Chancellor, UWE

Dear Professor West, Professor Coffey, and Dr Griffiths

I am writing to you on behalf of the British Philosophical Association and on behalf of many Heads of UK Philosophy Departments (listed below) and Philosophical Learned Societies. The BPA wrote to you on Friday 19th June 2020 to voice our concerns about your University's decision to close the philosophy BA programme, and to invite UWE Bristol to meet with us to discuss these concerns. The 54 undersigned heads of department and leaders in Philosophy support our request that UWE Bristol engage in a dialogue with us, as the national subject association, about the future of its Philosophy programmes.

To reiterate: we understand that your University is considering the closure of the philosophy BA programme, thus effectively removing an entire discipline from UWE Bristol's teaching portfolio. We are very disturbed by this news, and we strongly urge you to reconsider this decision. We think that no University should plan to end its philosophy provision without a clear rationale, and without having first exhausted all the alternatives, and we would like to help you avoid making a poorly-judged, ill-informed decision. The BPA are well placed to help develop a response to whatever has precipitated this proposed course of action, and to help UWE Bristol to sustain its degree in philosophy.

We do not know what UWE Bristol's decision-making process involves, but we understand that your colleagues in Philosophy have not been given a clear, well-evidenced rationale for this decision. We would welcome an opportunity to share data about student demand for philosophy degrees with you, particularly since HESA data show philosophy is experiencing year-on-year growing demand, during a period in which other subjects in the humanities have experienced declining numbers. Similarly, there are strong data showing that philosophy has excellent attainment levels and career outcomes. We believe that philosophy departments should be able to sustain viable and successful BA degrees in the foreseeable future so long as there is a widespread commitment within the University to ensuring that these courses are properly visible and effectively promoted.

We understand that the current climate is rather uniquely challenging, and that there is a sense that there is a need for fast-paced change, but we do not think that such decisions should be taken without full information. There are many senior and experienced academics in the discipline who would be happy to serve as external advisors on any review of the degree programme, and we would be happy to put you in touch with them. We believe that this is a far better course of action, and better justified, than any closure.

Philosophy at UWE Bristol has an outstanding reputation for teaching European and socially engaged philosophy, and for its focus on topics in social and political philosophy. It is significant that UWE Bristol delivers a philosophical education to students from a variety of educational backgrounds. The proposal to close philosophy at UWE Bristol is at risk of repeating the mistakes of a regrettable trend from the 90s; then, there was a series of closure of philosophy departments and those were often in post-92 institutions, where there was more focus on the European traditions in philosophy, and at institutions which tended to have much larger numbers of BAME students. We believe there are no principled or acceptable reasons for philosophy to be taught only at Russell Group universities, and we are committed to supporting ways for the discipline to become more diverse. It is hard to

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see how a University can be genuinely concerned with protecting and developing the student body if it is proposing to cut a uniquely placed Philosophy programme which goes to the core of exploring social and political concerns.

One of the consequences of the current Covid-19 pandemic is that local provision of subjects will be even more vital for those who are unable to travel away from their immediate area to live at another University, and this will be most prominent among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. There needs to be widespread provision of subjects geographically and across the University sector, or else the study of some subjects will become impossible for people who are currently underrepresented.

Once again: we urge you to reconsider the course of action that you are currently pursuing, and that you take steps to protect your Philosophy degree programme. If we can be of any further assistance in this matter, as we are confident that we can be we will be very happy to help in any way that we can, whether it is by providing more information about the HE philosophy sector, or by suggesting external experts to make recommendations for your ongoing Philosophy degree provision. We politely request that the University sends information about the timeline that it foresees for this decision-making process, and hope that the University takes up the BPA's offer to be involved in these discussions. We repeat our invitation to set up a meeting with you, at your earliest convenience, to discuss both the merits of, and the options for, keeping the programme alive.

Yours sincerely



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President of the British Philosophical Association

Prof Ben Colburn, Head of Philosophy, University of Glasgow.

Prof Robert Northcott, Head of Department of Philosophy, Birkbeck College, University of London.

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

Dr Nick Treanor, Head of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Manuel Dries, Head of Philosophy and Senior Lecturer, The Open University.

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

Prof Jonathan Webber, President of the UK Sartre Society and Head of Philosophy, Cardiff University.

Dr Esther McIntosh, Associate Head of School of Humanities, York St John University.

Dr Davide Rizza, Head of Philosophy, University of East Anglia.

Prof Chris Timpson, Philosophy Faculty Board Chair, University of Oxford.

Dr Paul Reid-Bowen, Programme Coordinator Religions, Philosophies and Ethics, Bath Spa University.

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

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

Dr Derek H. Brown, Secretary, Scots Philosophical Association.

Prof Christopher Bennett, Head of the Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield.

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

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

Prof Denis McManus, Head of Department of Philosophy, University of Southampton.

Dr Neil Sinclair, Head of Department of Philosophy, University of Nottingham.

Prof Stephen Mumford, Head of Philosophy, Durham University.

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

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

Dr Daniel Whistler, Programme Leader for Philosophy, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Dr Alberto Toscano, Co-Director, Centre for Philosophy and Critical Thought, Goldsmiths, University of London.

Prof Jenny Saul, Chair of the Analysis Trust.

Dr Katharine Jenkins, Director of the Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP UK).

Prof Samir Okasha, Head of Department of Philosophy, Bristol.

Prof James Tartaglia, Philosophy Programme Director, Keele University.

Dr Stephen Burwood, Programme Director for Philosophy, University of Hull.

Dr Alison Ainley, Head of Humanities and Social Sciences and Principal Lecturer Philosophy, Anglia Ruskin University (Cambridge).

Prof Jessica Brown, Head of Philosophy, University of St Andrews, Editor of the Philosophical Quarterly, Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Dr Stacie Friend, President, British Society of Aesthetics.

Dr Paddy McQueen, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Swansea University.

Prof Bob Brecher, Director of the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics & Ethics, University of Brighton.

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