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Pursuing the Diversity and Inclusion Agenda: the PSA in the UK

Anil Awesti (University of Warwick), Matt Flinders (University of Sheffield) & Heather Savigny (Bournemouth University)

This article explores the way in which the UK Political Studies Association (PSA) has sought to tackle issues of inclusion within the profession. UK political science is dominated by white males, and while women have made progress, we argue this is less so for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) colleagues. In both cases, we view progress as likely to be limited without proactive intervention strategies. We draw on work that we have recently been doing with the PSA and offer some positive strategies for embedding this agenda within the profession. We argue that for a vibrant, pluralist and healthy political science, a diversity of academics is needed, and that learned societies and professional organisations have a key role to play in advancing this agenda.

Under the new Political Studies Association (PSA) Chair (Matt Flinders) and building on the work of the PSA's Diversity and Equality Working Group¹, the PSA is set to launch an Equality and Diversity 10 Year Strategic Plan in 2017. This article gives an overview of just some of the issues facing the profession, a discussion as to what we mean by Equality and Diversity, and a summary of some of the practical measures that we have taken to date in order to seek to redress some of the imbalances within the profession.

State of profession

In a bid to start somewhere, this work begins with the observation that women of all colours and Black And Minority Ethnic (BAME) men are underrepresented within the profession. More generally within the academy women comprise only 14.2% of Vice-Chancellors, 20.5% of the professoriate (Equality Challenge Unit), with only 10 of those professors being women from BAME backgrounds. Furthermore, the University and College Union (UCU) tells us that the pay gap between men and women in UK academia is 13.5%. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2015) data also tells us that 44% of students declare a disability and that 30.6% of undergraduate and postgraduate students are from BAME backgrounds. (These data are not broken down between men and women). There is also no recent bespoke data in these latter areas for political science. Historically, we see from table 1, that while women and men are broadly evenly represented at undergraduate and PGT levels, men become significantly over represented as we move higher up the professional ladder. We might also note that change has been quite slow over the last 20 or so years, and as such, we argue that an 'evolutionary' approach may not be the best strategy, rather we are seeking to develop more proactive strategies (as detailed below). These data reflect academia more broadly, and are limited as they are not available to us, by race, ethnicity, or discipline.

¹ Founded in 2009 by Vicky Randall and James Chiriyankandath.

Table 1: Percentage of Female & Male Political Science Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught & Postgraduate Research Students, and Female & Male Political Scientists, 1994/95-2009/10

Academic year	♀ UG	♂ UG	♀ PGT	♂ PGT	♀ PGR	♂ PGR	♀ Academics	♂ Academics
1994	41%	59%	41%	59%	29%	71%		
1995	42%	58%	43%	57%	31%	69%		
1996	43%	57%	46%	54%	33%	67%		
1997	44%	56%	47%	53%	34%	66%	19%*	81%*
1998	46%	54%	47%	53%	36%	64%		
1999	46%	54%	47%	53%	36%	64%		
2000	47%	53%	49%	51%	37%	63%		
2001	46%	54%	51%	49%	38%	62%		
2002	44%	56%	44%	56%	36%	64%	24%*	76%*
2003	43%	57%	46%	54%	37%	63%		
2004	43%	57%	46%	54%	38%	62%		
2005	43%	57%	46%	54%	39%	61%		
2006	43%	57%	45%	55%	41%	59%		
2007	44%	56%	45%	55%	39%	61%		
2008	45%	55%	45%	55%	38%	62%		
2009	44%	56%	45%	55%	38%	62%	30%†	70%†

Source: Bates et al, 2012 p144.

More specifically, in relation to political science, the PSA's 'Survey of the Profession' conducted in 2009 (PSA, 2009a) found that 30% of the profession are women and 3.5% are from a BAME background. Disaggregated further, women made up 12% of professors at 'new universities' and 16.9% at 'traditional universities'. The figures for BAME professors were 4% at 'new universities' and 2.5% at 'traditional universities'. Overall, the survey showed women to be most represented at the research fellow/assistant level at both new and traditional universities and BAMEs at the senior lecturer level in new universities and lecturer level at traditional ones. Interestingly, within the survey, 48.4% of all respondents and 73.6% of female respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that 'women have the same opportunities as men in the political science profession'.

Also in 2009, the PSA undertook research on the ethnic composition of the student population on politics programmes within British universities based on 2007-08 HESA data (PSA, 2009b). According to 2012 Census data, 14% of the UK population self identify as BAME. Amongst first degree students, British BAME students made up 10.36% of the population. The largest British BAME group was British African students representing 3.36% of the population, followed by British Indian students at 2.41%, British Pakistani students at 1.35%, British Bangladeshi students at 0.79% and British Chinese students at 0.28%. At the postgraduate taught level, the proportion of British BAME students decreased to 6.09% of the population. British African students represented 2.02% of the population with every other British BAME group at less than 1%. A further decrease was witnessed at the postgraduate research level where British BAMEs represented only 3.36% of all PGR students. As such, there is a clear decrease in the proportion of British BAME students as the degree level increases. The research also shows that non-Russell Group and post-1992 institutions are more likely to consist of higher proportions of British BAME students. Similarly, as current data (below) from the Equality Challenge Unit demonstrates, there is a considerable 'drop off' between women and men throughout the differing stages in the political science profession, and despite near equity at undergraduate level, men's over representation continues on an upward trend at the differing stages through the profession until reaching 81% in the Professoriate. Given that women comprise 51% of the UK population, and the intake in political science at undergraduate level, we might expect that there was a more even balance at senior levels.

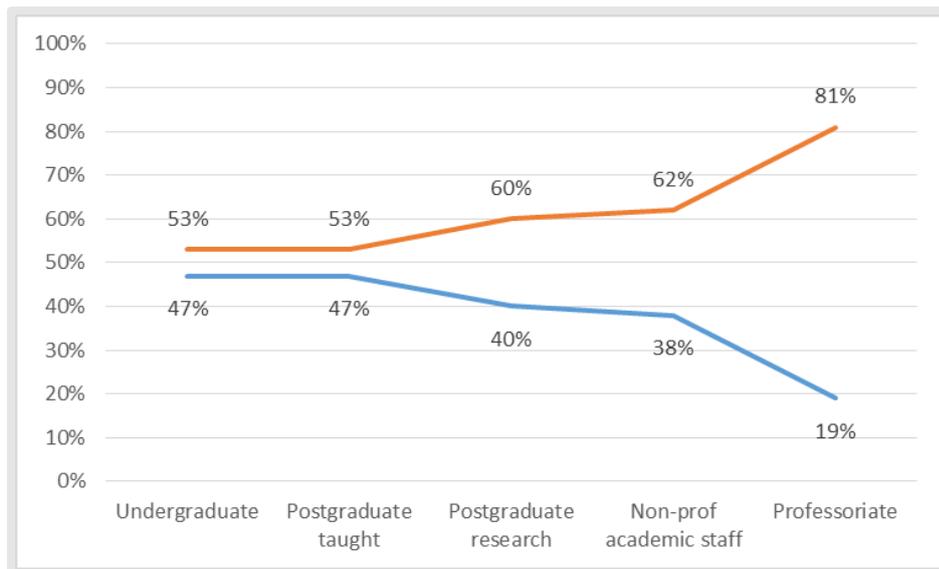


Figure 1. Equality Challenge Unit Data on Politics Departments presented to the PSA Heads of Department Conference 10th December 2015. Key: bottom line is numbers of women; top line represents numbers of men.

There is literature which has mapped the descriptive representation of women in Political Science and sought to explore reasons for women's exclusion (e.g. Akhtar et al., 2005a, 2005b; Childs and Krook, 2006; Norris, 1990; Bates et al, 2012; Bates & Savigny, 2014). This links to a wider literature on the gendered nature of HE (e.g. Knights & Richards, 2003; Acker, 1990, 2006; Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012) where 'hegemonic masculinities' may be structurally and culturally reinforced (Pacholok, 2009, Bird, 2011; Savigny, 2014). While much of this literature focuses on women, as Sara Ahmed (2012) observes there is very little recognition of the intersectional experiences within the academy, and this work has not been done within political science. Drawing on data, academic literature, and experiences within the profession, the learned society for the profession in the UK, the PSA is seeking to explore how it can operationalise and implement proactive strategies, to play a role in making the profession more inclusive.

What do we mean by Equality and Diversity?

Equality and Diversity are terms which are subject to much debate and part of our remit has been to think about exactly what we mean by these terms. The Equality Act came in to law in 2010, however, this relates largely to employers and we are seeking to address what this means as a profession and as a learned society; how do we create a more inclusive professional culture? In our thinking we wish to adopt an intersectional approach, building on the work of Crenshaw (1989) where we recognise that race, gender and class intersect to disadvantage particular individuals and groups in differing ways. Moreover, drawing on work from those such as Butler (1990) we acknowledge that sexuality is significant in the construction of identity and this can also be the source of discrimination and deleterious effects and experiences. The ways in which identities are constructed and performed in the workplace has been the site of considerable discussion within academic literature (cf. Acker, 1996). However, work has downplayed the intersectional experiences of those with differing racial, class (cf. Crenshaw, 1989) or sexual identity (cf. Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2011); those who exist in a space which differs from the often assumed white male heterosexual middle class abled bodied 'norm'. In challenging and questioning this norm as a 'standard operating procedure' this literature seeks to open up space where a more inclusive, and alternate politics may take place. Moreover, given the number of students declaring a

disability (as above) and the increasing visibility given for example, to mental health problems within the profession (as detailed in media articles in *The Guardian* and *Times Higher*) our work also aims to integrate these components. As Sealy & Singh (2009) argue, the absence of role models is a key barrier to success for those who are in those structurally disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

In short, we might argue that we are adopting a distinctly normative approach, one based in social justice which seeks to question the under representation of structurally disadvantaged groups within the profession. For Sara Ahmed (2012), diversity is linked to inclusion, and is emergent from cultural and structural experiences of exclusion. Her work encourages us to stop and think how dominant hierarchies and power structures are reproduced. This may be through actuality, or perception, but ultimately if the outcome is exclusion this is unhealthy for both individuals, groups and for the profession more broadly. In this way, we argue it is important to identify those sites where exclusion can take place, in order to think through mechanisms whereby we can reflect on more inclusive practices. Intersectional approaches highlight how alternate politics can be articulated, where a diversity of views and experiences can be vocalised and if we are seeking to enhance the knowledge we produce within the profession then issues of diversity and inclusion can only lead to a plurality of voices, politics, methodologies and insights; in essence it can only enhance the quality of the profession.

Work done within the PSA

Academic research has explored the ways in which gender impacts the formal institutions of politics (e.g Childs & Campbell, 2014; 2015 a& b; Annesley & Gains, 2014; Kantola, 2010) and we are seeking to draw on these lessons for understanding the ways in which gender, race, class, disability, sexuality impact our professional lives as well as that which we study and analyse. We are not suggesting a 'one size' fits all approach to equality and diversity, rather we see the agenda of inclusion as something which is a 'sensitivity' reflecting a set of values and an ethos. The recent elections of Matt Flinders and Rosie Campbell as Chair and Vice Chair respectively, in 2014 witnessed a broader shift in PSA strategy, which has been labelled PSA+. The PSA+ agenda is founded upon the principles of ambition, visibility and professionalism; the Equality and Diversity agenda is about all of these elements. The aim is nothing short of transformational in the sense of how we undertake the study of politics and this is designed to resonate with concern about broader societal shifts in relation to democratic inequality (IPPR Report of 2012). These values for the PSA are set out in the Chair's E&D statement (see Appendix 1). This statement raises a series of questions and issues which form the basis of an ethos, and a vision statement for the profession. From this basis we are also seeking to practically and systematically address contemporary issues of inclusion and exclusion across the profession and the discipline. Our focus to date has been within the profession, but below we also outline where we plan future work in relation to the discipline and impact.

To date, during the last 18 months the PSA has made the following changes²:

- Following some years where all male keynotes have been in evidence at PSA Annual conferences, the 2016 annual conference features an all-female keynote line up and guidelines have been developed to ensure future conferences are conscious of gender and race balances. The PSA is not alone in having to address this issue, and from our experience we have devised the following list of suggestions in conference planning in order to avoid all male line ups:

1. Don't wait until the last minute to ask women or ethnic minority speakers. Both the Women and Politics Specialist Group and the Diversity and Equality Group can advise on speakers.

² This are not listed in any order of priority rather are intended as an indicative list of some of our measures since the launch of the change agenda in the PSA. This is also not intended as an exhaustive list, rather it reflects what we have achieved to date.

2. Recognise that the first names you think of may well be male. So look around at who else has written in that area. Numerous studies show that white men are more likely to cite, invite and promote other white men, with the work by women and ethnic minorities being overlooked. Search for your conference topic and see what women and ethnic minorities have written on it.

3. Include the following wording in your call for papers: Panel proposers are asked to pay particular attention to the Equality and Diversity agenda being pursued by the PSA. All panels, plenaries and roundtables are expected to reflect the diversity of the profession in their composition and risk being rejected if they do not do so.

4. Think about the wording used in the call for paper. How far does the subject area lend itself to all white male panels, and what kind of alternate conceptions of politics might be articulated to address this?

- The OSA has a number of Specialist Groups, which allow for more in depth study in areas such as ‘Media and Politics’ ‘Environmental Politics’ to name but a few. Changes centrally have been introduced in the management and funding of these groups, so that now, PSA Specialist Groups are required to demonstrate their efforts to address Equality and Diversity issues in their annual applications for funding. As such, funding application forms have been redesigned to encourage Specialist Groups to reflect on how they have met or attempted to meet the E&D agenda and differing levels of funding are awarded with this in mind.
- The PSA offers a series of annual prizes. To date, the prizes have all been in the names of male scholars in the field. We have therefore introduced prizes that reflect the contribution of female scholars to the discipline.
- Both the PSA Specialist Groups ‘Women and Politics’ and the Diversity and Equality Working Group hold lists of female speakers and BAME men and women, contactable via the PSA, and can advise for keynote events.
- At the annual Heads of Department and Specialist Group conferences, we have held Equality and Diversity events that have been well received. The aim of these events is to get people talking about their experiences (some of which are detailed in the following section) and how we as a profession can continue to advance this agenda.
- We have created a post which will be located in the PSA Head Office, with its central remit to develop a 10 Year Equality and Diversity Strategic Plan, which will be launched at the 2017 PSA Annual conference.
- Chair’s Commissions have been a way to reconnect the PSA with its membership and data gathering by these have also been informed by a concern with E&D, and again, here we have sought to mainstream the E&D agenda as the PSA moves forward.
- The Women and Politics Group produced a forceful document challenging the proposed revisions to the A level curriculum which write women as political thinkers out of the textbooks (with the exception of Mary Wollstonecraft) and remove feminism from the syllabus. Here we could argue that the PSA has had ‘impact’ in the sense that we are speaking beyond the confines of the PSA, to those who are setting education agendas.
- Given the increasing significance attached to Athena Swan by funders and by other external bodies, the PSA is seeking to work towards Athena Swan accreditation.

We recognise there is much work to do, within the profession, the curriculum and externally. We have much to learn from other learned societies such as APSA, the mathematical society etc. We also want to think about what ‘success’ looks like; where will we be 10 or 20 years from now? Success, we argue, may be difficult to overtly measure in entirely empirical terms. Of course, one simple measure may well be to see equal numbers of women and men at senior levels in the profession, and at the same time, proportionately more BAME candidates at senior level (both men and women). However, we do not think that numbers alone are the end point of ‘success’. Success is more of a sensibility; a cultural ethos.

We are seeking to shape the profession so that people are not disadvantaged because of their gender, race or ethnicity.

Our 2017 strategic plan, will also focus on questions as to where we, as a profession, might like to be. To date, much of the work we have done has focused on changes within the PSA as an organisation. Our preliminary data gathering and work to date, suggests that the following are just a few of the areas we may seek to work on. Within the discipline: Foster et al (2012) highlight the paucity of teaching of gender across the discipline. Clearly, if we are not teaching and asking our students to think about race, gender (disability and sexuality) as part of the study of politics, where politics is about power relationships, then structural disadvantage becomes (or has become) normalised as part of the current teaching agenda (where we teach mainly about the institutions created by, and actions of, straight, white, able bodied, middle class, white men). As such, part of our plan includes a reflection on how we might generate an inclusive teaching and learning environment in political science. In terms of impact, we are seeking to work with colleagues from APSA and other learned societies, to establish good and best practice and these latter two are areas we would seek to address and expand upon in our 10 year plan. We are looking to learn from other professional organisations, how they have tackled this issue, and what we can implement in order to improve the status of those who are structurally disadvantaged within the profession.

The wider Politics of Equality and Diversity

As shown above, we recognise that there is not one simple solution. We have outlined some of the measures we have taken, and examples of things that work that can also be useful. Often, little things can have big impacts. For example, Paul Cairney at the University of Stirling has taken a specific approach to writing job adverts that has been to attract the research and teaching that women are more likely to do. He has used his blog post to provide advice to candidates on what to expect at interview. This is seen as particularly useful for those who are not part of 'insider' group within the discipline and may not be aware of the informal, unwritten rules of the interview process. Adam Fagan at Queen Mary, University of London has also led a wide scale series of departmental changes, which have included research support and teaching relief for colleagues returning from maternity leave. Case studies of good practice can facilitate a dialogue, and some of this agenda is about raising consciousness, and providing a space where alternate approaches are possible.

More broadly, we want to also be clear that this is not a 'top down' agenda; this is about positive dialogue and critical reflection on what it is that we are as a profession and a discipline. We are not saying that there has previously been some kind of deliberate agenda of exclusion; however we are looking to the cultural and structural reasons why inequalities exist. It is often due to embedded, subconscious cultural practices that institutions seek to reproduce and replicate the characteristics of the dominant group rather than conscious discrimination. Over time, these practices become norms of operation and structure what (and who) is valued. It is within these norms that we seek to intervene. The aim of PSA+ is a positive reform agenda where the benefits of a more inclusive and diverse profession and discipline are foregrounded.

Conclusion

UK political science clearly suffers from the underrepresentation of certain groups. It is a field which has traditionally been, and remains, dominated by a 'norm' of being white, male, heterosexual, middle class and abled bodied. As such, it is a discipline and a profession which is seen to provide value to the qualities that are assumed to be attached to these characteristics. As an attempt to intervene in these working practices, we have set out indicative, rather than exhaustive, accounts of an agenda to bring a more inclusive perspective to UK political science as a profession, a discipline and as a society that has the opportunity for 'impact'. There is an ambition that the PSA becomes a leader amongst the learned

societies, and as a beacon and innovator of best practice. The changes that are taking place within the PSA as part of the PSA+ agenda are attempts at dialogue that can usefully lead to transformation and greater inclusivity and diversity within the profession.

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Appendix 1: PSA Chair's Equality and Diversity Statement



Political Studies Association

SHAPING THE FUTURE: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND AMBITION

The PSA believes that the promotion of equality and diversity should be core values for the practice of politics as well as the study and teaching of politics. Statistics suggest that 31 per cent of political scientists are female, less than 15 per cent of the discipline's professoriate is female and under 4 per cent have a black or ethnic minority background. In June 2015 the Executive Committee of the Political Studies Association (PSA) re-emphasized the organization's need to think creatively and proactively in relation to the equality and diversity agenda. The Equality and Diversity Group has been tasked to lead on the development of a ten-year plan with the aim of shaping both the demographic structure and day-to-day culture of the discipline. This objective resonates with the PSA's commitment to *professionalism, ambition* and *visibility* across all of its areas of activity and will therefore be embedded across the organization. This signals a fresh commitment to equality and diversity and a number of reforms and procedural changes have already been put in place:

- i) New systems for the selection of Annual Conference plenary speakers and paper givers have been established to optimize diversity on panels and with invited speakers.
- ii) A new annual reporting process for our specialist groups will require evidence of action taken and future goals for achieving the PSA's diversity and equality ambitions.
- iii) The annual Heads of Departments Meeting will include some element of training or discussion in relation to equality and diversity.
- iv) The PSA is exploring options for external diversity and equality training and accreditation.
- v) A range of new PSA prizes have been agreed to increase the visibility of female and ethnic minority scholars and to reward achievement in relation to the promotion of equality and diversity.

There is, however, a need to go much further than these measures and to think more creatively about equality and diversity in relation to a broad range of issues. The next phase of the agenda focuses on equality and diversity issues with regards to age, disability, socio-economic background, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, belief, sex, gender and sexual orientation. In order to achieve far-reaching and meaningful outcomes the PSA must seek not only to *change* the academic environment of today but also to *shape* the next academic generation. The PSA will be working across PSA programmes to consider the transition points throughout the educational system to encourage participation by a range of students from various backgrounds and diverse perspectives.

What Next?

As PSA President, I have asked the Diversity and Equality Working Group to lead on the development of a Strategic Plan that will draw on best practice and the experience of other organizations and learned societies around the world. Developing this plan is likely to require extensive research and the deployment of some resources but it is an investment in the future health of the PSA and an opportunity for positive change. The Diversity Group may consider the following key questions:

- i) What might the PSA learn from the experience of other professional associations in the UK and abroad?
- ii) Are their subject-specific impediments to recruiting students and staff from all sections of society?
- iii) What does the data show about demographic profiles at different educational levels?
- iv) Is there a link between representation *in* politics and representation *within* the study of politics?
- v) How might we maintain overall coherency while focusing on particular issues and challenges?
- vi) What are the risks that need to be managed and what are the risks that simply cannot be avoided?
- vii) What would success look like in the context of an equality and diversity agenda and how can the measurement of success be achieved?
- viii) How can the equality and diversity agenda be made to underpin advances in relation to teaching, impact and research?
- ix) What would a focus on *transitions* – between levels or academic ranks – suggest about the need for rethinking critical elements of educational or professional pathways?
- x) How might the widening participation and outreach activity conducted by individual universities feed into a PSA equality and diversity reform programme?

The draft Equality and Diversity Strategic Plan will be open for consultation, discussion and refinement throughout 2016 with the Edinburgh Conference in May 2016 providing an important point in the process. Update reports will form a standing item for all future Executive Committee meetings. The PSA theme for 2017 will be ‘Equality and Diversity in Action’. The final Equality and Diversity Strategic Plan will be published and launched at the 2017 Annual Conference.

Matthew Flinders	Rosie Campbell	Helena Djurkovic
Chair, Political Studies Assoc.	Vice Chair, Political Studies Assoc.	Chief Executive, Political Studies Assoc.

Biographies

Anil Awesti is a Tutor for the Department of Politics and International Studies (PAIS) and [Centre for Lifelong Learning](#) (CLL) at the University of Warwick. Anil is Chair of the [Political Studies Association's Diversity & Equality Working Group](#). He has a particular interest in the under-representation of people from British black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds within the profession of politics and international relations. As such, he is undertaking work analysing the position of BMEs within the discipline, feeding in to the national initiatives being developed in this area.

Matt Flinders is Chair of the PSA and Professor of Politics at Sheffield University, where he is also founder of the Sir Bernard Crick Centre. Alongside his academic publications, he is also a writer and broadcaster and has made numerous contributions to national newspapers, including *The Times* and *The Guardian*, and in 2011 he wrote and presented a three-part series for BBC Radio 4 entitled [‘In Defence of Politics’](#).

Heather Savigny is Associate Professor in Politics & Gender at Bournemouth University. She is a member of the PSA Executive and Equality and Diversity Working Group. She publishes broadly in the areas of media, politics and gender.

3 citations:

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