

CHAPTER 4

New Dawn

The Turn of the Millennium, 1990–2020

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Introduction

The 1990s marked a period of significant change for higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, with reforms conducted throughout the 1980s laying the groundwork for a further professionalisation of academic life. These organisational and cultural transformations were accompanied by a change in demographics, with more and more women entering higher education, both as students but also as professors, and the overall student body growing increasingly international. The School also began a wider pivot of its student body towards the European Union, opening up the Government Department to an influx of new students from all over the continent. As the Thatcher era drew to a close on 28 November 1990, these changes were beginning apace.

From the historical perspective of the Government Department, however, these professional reforms coincided with another, more symbolic event. Three weeks later, on 18 December, Michael Oakeshott passed away at his home in Acton,¹ marking the end to an era that dominated the study of political science

¹ Franco & Marsh 2012: 1.

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at the School since the early 1950s. And, while the Oakeshottians did continue to hold appointments in the Department, they grew less influential with each passing year. Elie Kedourie and Maurice Cranston each stayed on throughout the 1990–1991 academic year, teaching on ‘The Political Thought of Hegel and Marx’ and ‘The History of Political Thought’. Ken Minogue remained on the faculty until his retirement in 1995, and Ernest Thorp until 2003. However, their prior standing in the Department was much diminished, and a new empirical orthodoxy had become the focus of a reinvigorated and research-oriented Department of Government, as John Major stepped into Downing Street.

A Different Way of Thinking: Brian Barry

This effort of professionalisation was led by Brian Barry, perhaps the last of the Department’s great ‘eccentrics’ who had been so prevalent in previous decades. Barry arrived at the LSE in 1987 from the California Institute of Technology, having held previous positions at Birmingham, Keele, Oxford, Essex, British Columbia and Chicago. He took a First in Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Queen’s College, Oxford, spending a year at Harvard with John Rawls before earning his DPhil. under the supervision of the famous analytic legal philosopher, H. L. A. Hart, in 1964.² Barry, who by the time of his appointment had become a leading analytic philosopher in his own right, was a committed empirical social scientist. And, while he would remain at the School for just 11 years, his influence on the character of the Department was profound.

Barry was an interesting personality, even in a Department characterised by a run of esoteric and maverick leaders. He convened a meeting of rational choice theorists and other ‘positive’ political scientists at his Bloomsbury flat, colloquially known as ‘The Rationalists’, many of whom would go on to play major roles in the future of the Department.³ Professor Kai Spiekermann recalls that once, during the weekly Thursday gathering of the political theorists at the LSE Beaver’s Retreat, he and Barry got into a heated argument over the 20 July ‘Operation Valkyrie’ plot to assassinate Hitler, masterminded by the German Army Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg. Barry loudly proclaimed that von Stauffenberg was a ‘coward’ and should have remained in the room to kill Hitler, rather than leaving the briefcase unattended to explode, which ultimately caused the plot to fail.⁴ Barry also struggled with bipolar disorder throughout his life, a condition which affected his relationship with students and staff at times. He could be short with pupils, and sometimes difficult. Brian ‘didn’t tolerate much

² Kelly 2009.

³ Kelly interview 2020.

⁴ Kai Spiekermann, personal communication, 2020.

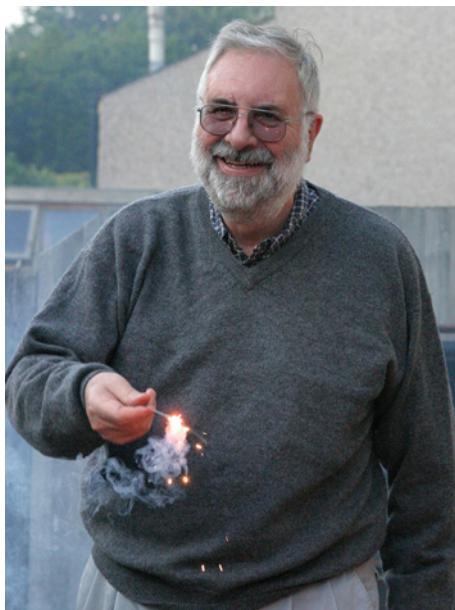


Figure 17: Professor Brian Barry in 2004, celebrating July 4th at a barbeque hosted by Professor Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey.

nonsense', and his 'very high intellectual standards'—which were such a blessing for his academic work—led to tension with others on occasion, recalls Albert Weale, a former doctoral student of Barry's and Emeritus Professor of Political Theory and Public Policy.⁵ On at least one occasion, there were accounts of PhD students who left due to his somewhat volatile personality. However, despite these frictions, Barry is always recalled with great affection and generosity by those who knew him personally. He was another larger-than-life personality in a Department characterised by similar titans of political thought who were enthusiastic, difficult and brilliant.

Barry's intellectual legacy remains widely recognised even today. His doctoral thesis, published in 1965 as 'Political Argument', came to be 'one of the principal contributions to the development of post-war political theory', and 'remains a compendium of how we conceptualize, analyse and defend claims about democracy, power and justice'.⁶ His writings on political philosophy were recognised through elections to major fellowships during his career, joining the British Academy in 1988 and later the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was also the only British academic to receive the prestigious

⁵ Weale telephone interview 2020.

⁶ Ibid.

Johann Skytte prize from the University of Uppsala, a recognition for his contributions to the study of political science.

However, Barry's lasting legacy at the School went beyond pure scholarship. Although he was Convenor for only two years, from 1993 to 1995, the institutional reforms he implemented in the Government Department had a strong impact on the scholarship that was to follow. 'He was a great institution-builder' and a 'very good talent spotter': he 'could fit people to jobs very well' and 'get them working for the common good'.⁷ He had also arrived at a time when an important group of emerging political scientists were beginning to make their mark on the Department's character. Rodney Barker, Patrick Dunleavy and George Jones taught key courses on the BSc, such as 'Modern Politics and Government, with Special Reference to Britain'.⁸ Jones had previously been Convenor of the Department in the mid-1980s and Barker would go on to hold the Convenership of the Department from 2007 to 2009. Dunleavy would feature heavily in the empirical restructuring plan long after Barry and his successor, Christopher Hood, had departed. All three helped build this new vision for the Department, focused on rigour, research and a global reputation.

The importance of the institutional reforms Barry implemented is hard to overstate, and to fully appreciate their significance requires revisiting the historical context. Barry was 'basically told to sort out the Department' as it 'was a failing Department'.⁹ As seen in Chapter 2, the appointments process during the 1950s and 1960s was informal and ad hoc. Appointments were conducted through personal networks, often through Oakeshott himself, driven by a unified idea of what the Department stood for and the sort of faculty that would help realise that. The idea of a competitive process for professional recruitment was not prevalent at the time. As Brendan O'Leary recalls, for one new lectureship:

Oakeshott goes to Dublin and he hears a lecture on medieval political thought by John Morrell. He has a drink at the bar with Morrell at the University College Dublin, and he says to Morrell: Please, show up to LSE on Monday, I have a job for you. Morrell and his wife had a real row because his wife could not believe he was going to be offered a job by Oakeshott in this manner. Morrell decided to take the risk and flew to London. He arrived and Oakeshott gave him a job, a lectureship in political theory. At Morrell's departure speech, he said that he was given no employment contract, he was given no guidance to his actual duties, he got the rough idea that maybe he had to show up twice a week to perform his teaching duties and that was it.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ LSE 1990.

⁹ Dowding interview 2020.

¹⁰ O'Leary interview 2020.

This lack of a competitive recruitment process also meant that academics were under far less pressure to publish frequently. Professor Matt Matravers, who studied at the School from 1987 to 1994, recalls that for some LSE academics publishing was not a great priority.¹¹ In fact, some, such as the Oakeshottian scholar Ernest Thorp, had hardly published anything during their time.

In Barry's eyes, scholars who did not publish were 'creatures from another age'.¹² To refocus and reformulate the Department, he arranged to have dinners with those he felt he could persuade to leave, trying to convince them that it was in their interest to retire early.¹³ He found many were quite happy to take early retirement, realising that they had not found their careers in academia particularly fulfilling. In a similar vein, Barry conducted an audit of all the rooms under his control, and discovered that the famous philosopher Sir Karl Popper still had a secretary who was receiving his mail for him. As Popper had retired in 1969 and died in 1994, the secretary was redundant, and she was asked to leave her post.

The need to publish and to receive research grants had been impressed upon him throughout his career in the United States, which to some members of staff was 'a bit of a shock'.¹⁴ Key appointments such as Keith Dowding and Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey were made during his tenure, appointments which influenced the character of the Department long after Barry had left. He began by taking over courses on 'Modern Political Philosophy: Justice', co-running the first-year course and the second-year seminar on 'Political Philosophy' with John Charvet and Robert Orr, alongside Maurice Cranston and Brendan O'Leary.¹⁵ At the time—and up until 1995—the BSc (Econ.) remained the School's renowned 'first degree', integrating a number of subjects from political philosophy to applied economics under several 'streams'. The Convener of the Department during Barry's early years was Gordon Smith, who led third-year BSc courses on topics such as 'Comparative Political Analysis', as well as the politics and government of Eastern Europe and Germany.¹⁶

The transformation that took place at the faculty level also affected the doctoral training in the Department, which became much more formalised over the years. While the system provided good one-to-one supervision, it was not a rigorously structured programme with seminars or dedicated training. Competitive recruitment processes were virtually absent. In response, Barry reorganised the Department to emphasise these aspects. Initially, PhD students were not funded in the Department, which meant the School attracted applicants of a variable sort of academic quality and cohorts tended to be larger

¹¹ Matravers interview 2020.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Dowding interview 2020.

¹⁴ Matravers interview 2020.

¹⁵ LSE 1987: 488; LSE 1988: 485, 487.

¹⁶ LSE 1989: 510–511.

in size. Funding and selectiveness have resulted in more rigorous methods training and an overall better preparation for the academic job market. Teaching responsibilities for undergraduate students were, to a large extent, also transferred to PhD students or Fellows and away from members of staff, thus allowing academics to focus on research rather than teaching class material to undergraduates.¹⁷

While Barry's leadership played a significant role in promoting professionalism in the LSE Government Department, there were also more long-term, structural trends that supported this change in direction. And, while they had influenced Barry's time as Convener, they were to form the central issue for his successors as the century neared its end.

A Changing Landscape

After a brief, year-long stint under the direction of Alan Beattie—during which he 'continued to work hard to adapt the Department ... to the modern British academic realities'¹⁸—Christopher Hood took on the Convenership in 1995, continuing to implement the turn towards professionalisation initiated by Brian Barry. He joined the LSE from the University of Sydney in 1989, where he had been Professor of Public Administration, and upon arriving assumed command over several new and emerging courses at the LSE. In addition to helping run the Department's MSc in Public Administration and Public Policy, he co-founded both the MSc in Regulation and the Centre for the Analysis of Risk and Regulation. Hood's first few days as Convener were perhaps not as smooth as he would have hoped, and he was beset by a series of issues. On his first day, he received a phone call telling him that Brian Barry had been seriously injured in a car accident. Shortly after this, several computers were stolen from the Department. Finally, there was a phone call from the Finance Department saying that there was a black hole of almost £100,000 in the Department's spending from the previous year that was unaccounted for, and that evidence needed to be provided about this potentially improper conduct. This atmosphere of rapid problem solving was to set the tone for the late 1990s.

One of the major issues confronting both Barry and Hood was the creeping shift of the LSE's business structure, following the commercialisation of higher education in universities across Britain since the 1980s. As we shall see in the section entitled 'New Blood', below, this move worked in tandem with a reorientation in the Department's focus and hiring strategy. Moving towards more of a business model in their management approach, universities now increasingly emphasised their marketing and branding towards potential applicants. The School shifted towards a one-year taught Masters' model, which

¹⁷ Matravers interview 2020.

¹⁸ Lieven 2001: xxiii.

subsequently meant an increase in the number of overseas fee-paying students. It was a certain kind of business model which had far-reaching implications for the composition of the student body of the Government Department. There were fewer traditional British and Commonwealth students, with more international students arriving from the European Union, America and China. Barry's reforms had built on a broad-based realignment of the Department's research agenda, reorienting its focus to Europe and America. The West German Group led by Gordon Smith was influential in driving this research focus from 1992 to 1997, while the European Institute was also founded in 1991, hosting a string of new collaborative appointments between the Institute and the Department. In 1992, the Department even founded a joint BA in European Studies with King's College London, a programme whose three streams, 'On Europe', 'On France' and 'On Germany', allowed for student specialisation.¹⁹ Under Hood, this initial shift was reflected in the type of work being done by the Department, and the types of students and faculty it was attracting.

The most noticeable changes besides the outward recruitment drive for new students was the growing importance of research league tables and university rankings. Domestic rankings of British universities were first published in 1993 by *The Times Good University Guide* and have since become an influential factor in the university selection process by students. There are four main league tables at present: *The Times*, the *Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Complete University Guide*. Since 2008, *Times Higher Education* has compiled a 'Table of Tables', which summarises the results from the three main domestic rankings in any given year. The main objective of the league tables was to inform potential undergraduate applicants about UK universities—this is achieved through a range of criteria, including but not limited to entry standards, student satisfaction, staff/student ratio, academic services, research quality, completion rates and student destinations. They provide prospective students with relevant information on the quality of universities and degrees so that they can make informed choices. As such, the rise of university rankings is also an expression of the marketisation of the sector. All league tables also rank universities on their strength in individual subjects. Since their inception the Department has performed to a high standard of research, reflecting the efforts made to improve its standing in research assessments since the late 1980s.

This change paralleled efforts to bring the Department more in line with political science in the United States, altering the appointments structure for new faculty. The School moved its calendar in line with the US appointments system to increase the number of American applications. Previously, the appointments process involved inviting all candidates for a position to visit the School for one day, during which they would be interviewed, back-to-back, in the morning, and would (in some, but not all, cases) give presentations—again back-to-back—in the afternoon. Candidates were grilled by a panel of

¹⁹ Hix interview 2020.

six academics from the School, two from the Government Department, and four from other departments, for just 20 minutes. This process was extended after the Americanised reforms were introduced, with each candidate allocated one full day during which the appointments panel could get to know them individually, while simultaneously aiming to promote the benefits of the Department to them. The intention behind the change was on the one hand to attract the best candidates globally, both by making appointments at the same time as US universities and giving each potential applicant sufficient time in the Department itself. Alongside this more professional intent, the other aim was to create a more equitable and fair appointments system, one that would ideally result in more female and minority candidate appointments.

Despite general agreement on the scope and substance of this new appointment procedure, this change was not without some hiccups. One of the main criticisms came from Anne Phillips, who argued the new process may work against the appointment of more female and minority candidates. The concern was that the day-long interview, involving an evening dinner, would advantage more privileged and male candidates due to the emphasis on how well they fit within the existing Departmental work group. On the other hand, Simon Hix and Paul Kelly supported the decision, saying that research has shown that female candidates do best when competing for positions, and this new process would increase competition by reducing the role of ‘insular groups’ in appointments. The goal was to attract the best candidates, rather than friends, and this was believed to be the best way to make the process more equitable. Phillips’s concerns, though well grounded, were not borne out when this new selection process was implemented, and the number of female academics steadily increased in the following years.

Another central event during Hood’s tenure was the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), carried out in 1996. The RAE, now known as the Research Excellence Framework, was and remains a highly consequential development for universities, conducted to assess the quality of the research output of the institution, and to rank them accordingly. Hood presided over the first RAE where the Department had to select which members were to be entered for consideration. Previous assessments had seen the work of all eligible staff that submitted for assessment. As the RAE ranks universities based on the quality of their research profile, it became a ‘highly contentious’ event that had to be ‘thought about very carefully’.²⁰ A judgment had to be made ‘about what kind of research would give us the topmost grade’, a vital boost to the reputation of the Department at the time, while not offending or upsetting those faculty who would not be selected. It was a difficult affair to negotiate, and although the Department eventually gained the top grade from the exercise, Hood recalls

²⁰ Hood, telephone interview 2020.

it as a time of intense pressure for the School's professional vision of political science. 'My head would have been on the block, if we had not.'²¹

The significance the Department began to place on the RAE marked a new effort to have research drive the agenda of the School. Previously, following Lord Lionel Robbins's famous report in 1963, universities had placed most of their emphasis on 'teaching students how to think' by allowing research to coexist with the learning process.²² Teaching and research were the twin pillars of university education, the former dedicated to instructing undergraduates in the basic modes of thinking, and the latter the 'advancement and preservation of knowledge'.²³ Yet, policies adopted under the Thatcher government and its successors aimed to reorient this approach. An increase in managerial practices at the LSE coincided with this tilt towards research; 'a move towards departmental administrators, who were serious managers and paid serious money'.²⁴ The first of these was hired under Alan Beattie, followed by Christopher Hood's appointment of Nicole Boyce, who remained manager of the Department for almost 20 years. At that time, the Department also started taking a more inclusive approach to managing its affairs, involving graduate-level students in the running of the Department. These changes marked a Department increasingly conscious of both its internal management structure and of the job prospects of its students—one where research had become the dominant mode of practice.

However, this trend towards professionalisation in higher education has not always been seen as a positive phenomenon. While the Department's productivity and calibre of research has increased, many also lament a certain spirit having been lost along the way. Academics are under pressure to publish high-quality articles frequently, leading some scholars to suggest a one-article-per-year limit to curb this excessive demand.²⁵ Moreover, the traditional view of the university as a group of scholars, researchers and students, and administrators, who each contribute to its functioning by doing different bits and pieces, has begun to erode. Some go further, remarking the reforms in higher education amount to 'an assault on traditional academic values'.²⁶ Rodney Barker, who arrived at the School in 1971, notes that when he took up his post, 'finance was basically organised by one man', the 'Finance Officer'. Yet, increasingly, 'one feels that universities are a business run by a management, and the purpose of all these teachers and academics is to bring in funds'.²⁷ Echoing Barker, Nicholas Barr notes that the trajectory of academic life has been similar to tennis over the years.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Committee on Higher Education 1963: 90.

²³ Ibid.: 249.

²⁴ Hood telephone interview 2020.

²⁵ Frith 2019.

²⁶ Gewirtz & Cribb 2012: 69.

²⁷ Barker interview 2020.

Tennis turned professional, the strength, the quality of the game has increased immeasurably but something got lost as well ... We've become professionalised, productivity has increased enormously but something has got lost, including ... How many eccentrics are there at the LSE? There's not many ... I can remember the young Ken Binmore, the eminent mathematician and game theorist. As a young lecturer, he would be wandering around the School in bare feet because that's what he felt like doing ...²⁸

The turn towards professionalisation sparked by both Brian Barry and Christopher Hood's leadership was, then, not without its flaws. Research and teaching standards increased, while student and staff members were better protected. Yet, something has also been lost along the way, something far harder to quantify. The Department began to feel more like a corporate enterprise, concerned with marketing, profits, image and future employment prospects. In such an environment, the eccentrics who used to dominate this community all but evaporated; a community that Oakeshott and others like him fought so hard to defend. Yet, despite concerns about the demise of academic life, the professionalisation of the Government Department was driven more by commercial and institutional factors than it was by the scholars themselves. Brian Barry and Christopher Hood merely managed to translate these wider, external pressures successfully into institutional reforms, laying the foundations for a different, but nevertheless promising, attitude to Politics at the LSE.

New Blood

Barry and Hood's approach to administration and hiring was a major reason for the LSE thriving in the early 2000s as a hub for political research. On the political science and public administration side, academics began to focus their work on comparative studies, particularly in European politics. Despite being remembered as a 'lively' research centre during the 1980s by Professor Patrick Dunleavy, the Department's European Group had been small before the 1990s.²⁹ While professors had taught on European states and thought since the School's founding, little effort had been made to turn this into the study of Europe and its emerging institutions under the Oakeshottian old guard. As Christopher Hood departed for All Souls College in 2001, this process was already underway.

The appointments made by the new, professionalised Department significantly expanded their European focus, beginning with the arrival of Klaus Goetz in 1992 from Nuffield College, Oxford. Simon Hix joined in 1997 from

²⁸ Barr interview 2020.

²⁹ Dunleavy interview 2019.

Brunel, focusing his research on institutions, voting and the politics of Europe. He would become a recognisable and influential voice over the next two decades, and in 2015 would assume the inaugural Harold Laski Chair in Political Science, in memory of the Department's famous wartime professor. Sara Hobolt, the current occupant of the Sutherland Chair in European Institutions, arrived from St. John's College, Cambridge, as another expert in European politics, centring her research on referendums and democratic politics. Both were key members of Hood's 'new contingent' who, alongside Keith Dowding, Mark Thatcher and Paul Mitchell, helped create a stronger European Comparative Politics group in the Department.³⁰ Mitchell, who was appointed in 2000 and arrived in 2001 from Harvard, lectured on European Politics and research methodology, with a particular focus on Irish elections. Brendan O'Leary took over from Hood as Convener that year, continuing the trend that had been developing since Barry. Torun Dewan joined the Department from Nuffield College, Oxford, in 2002, with a focus on the political economy of parties and coalitions. Together with Barry, Hood and Dunleavy, this group of political scientists set out a new vision for the discipline at the School.

This vision was driven by a series of institutes either founded or significantly influenced by the Department. The European Institute was set up in 1991 by Howard Machin and other Government faculty to study both political integration and fragmentation in Europe, running alongside the West German Group. These were followed in 2015 by the 'UK in a Changing Europe' institute, set up to improve UK/EU research access jointly between the European Social Research Council (ESRC) and King's College London. The institute has involved many Government Department faculty in its research agenda, which has only increased in relevance and importance since the 2016 Referendum, and the decision for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Although recent, the decision has impacted on the internal affairs of the Department and the School as a whole. Several leading academics in the School who often advised the British Government on EU matters, such as Sara Hagemann, were informed their advice would not be sought on matters relating to Brexit because they were not British citizens. Other government faculty, such as Michael Barzelay, went on to join other institutes within the School. Barzelay, who joined in 1995, would remain a public administration lecturer until joining the Interdisciplinary Institute of Management in 2001, later becoming a founding member of the Department of Management in 2006.

Attempts were made to formalise the shift towards European studies, aligned with a more rigorous approach to Political Science. In 2010, the European Political Science Association (EPSA) was established. This new association involved many academics working on quantitative Political Science within the Government Department, and with a focus on the quantitative work done in the Political Studies group. The annual conference intended to 'represent and promote

³⁰ Hood telephone interview 2020.

political science in Europe.³¹ Simon Hix explains that one of the goals of the EPSA conference was to bring European Political Science in line with and up to the standards of the American Political Science Association. A second event led by individuals in the Department to consolidate the quantitative work was the Political Science and Political Economy Research Seminar, set up in 2009.³²

This increased focus on European politics occurred alongside the gradual disappearance of the lingering 'Imperialist' Public Administration legacy from the Department's early years. The rapid diversification of the student body between 1990 and 2010 helped accelerate this process, with more students arriving from Europe and fewer from the Commonwealth nations. This change was part of a larger drive for the LSE to become a 'European institution'.³³ And, as Brendan O'Leary neared the end of his Convenership in 2001, the Department had positioned itself to lead this effort, both in terms of the students and its academic focus on European comparative public policy. O'Leary notes that during this period there were even discussions about ending the LSE's reliance on government funding, making it independent and able to specialise on Masters' programmes focused globally, but particularly on Europe. As of the calendar year 1990–1991, students taking 'Government' as their special subject for the BSc (Econ.) were eligible for the European Erasmus exchange programme, with particular focus given to the School's partner institution in France, Sciences Po, Paris.³⁴

Prizes also began to proliferate in the School during this time, with the Government Department introducing a variety of awards to honour the academic performances of outstanding students. Among these are the Harold Laski Scholarship, awarded to the second-year BSc Government student with the best performance in both their first- and second-year examinations; the Bassett Memorial Prize, given to the final-year student with the best performance in the BSc Government or BSc Government and History programmes; and the Department of Government Dissertation Prizes, honouring outstanding performances on Government course dissertations at both Bachelors and Masters levels. A new prize was launched in 2020 to mark the 42 years of teaching in the Department by Patrick Dunleavy. The Patrick Dunleavy Prize is awarded to the BSc student with the best dissertation or long essay on public policy or elections.

The hiring story was similar for political theory. The Department mustered a series of impressive appointments, beginning with the arrival of Paul Kelly in 1995, and Anne Phillips in 1999. Kelly, whose main influences included Hart, Barry and Bentham, was active in the mid-1990s in helping establish the *Polit-*

³¹ European Political Science Association 2019.

³² Hix interview 2020.

³³ O'Leary interview 2020.

³⁴ LSE 1990.

ical Studies Review journal, which was published first in 2003.³⁵ His study of Western Political Thought with David Boucher, *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present* (2003), remains a detailed introduction to the subject. Phillips, who initially joined as Director of the School's Gender Institute, gradually moved to a joint appointment with the Government Department in 2004 (later becoming a sole appointment), with her research bringing together gender and politics. She is the Graham Wallas Chair of Political Science and leads the graduate course on 'Feminist Political Theory', writing influential works such as *The Politics of the Human* (2015). Cecile Fabre joined the cohort from Oxford at the turn of the millennium, teaching on general political concepts and the history of political thought, with Katrin Flikschuh following suit three years later, lecturing on the political philosophy of Immanuel Kant.³⁶ The famous liberal political philosopher and sceptic, John Gray, was an active member of the Government Department, writing a number of influential, if controversial, works, such as *Two Faces of Liberalism* (2000), *Straw Dogs* (2002) and *Heresies* (2004). More analytical appointments were made in the vein of Christian List, who joined as a lecturer in 2002 before assuming a dual professorship in the Political Science and Philosophy Departments five years later, followed by Kai Spekermann in 2007, working on the epistemological foundations of democratic theory.

Fabre departed for Oxford in 2007, marking a turn in the Department's attitude towards political philosophy. Chandran Kukathas arrived as Professor in Political Theory as Fabre left, a post he would continue to hold as Head of Department from 2015 until his departure in 2019. A leading liberal thinker famous for original works on multiculturalism, such as *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (2007), as well as his understanding of Friedrich Hayek, Kukathas would extend the Department's traditional focus, teaching modules on the 'Introduction to Political Theory', 'Twentieth Century European Liberal Thought' and 'Advanced Study of Key Political Thinkers'. Yet, an increasingly alternative and eclectic selection of political theorists were drawn to the School, from Lea Ypi's work on Marxist theory and critical thought to Leigh Jenco's focus on comparative and Chinese Political Philosophy.³⁷ Katrin Flikschuh also expanded her readings, examining how political concepts emerge in non-Western thought, particularly in African philosophy.

The political scientists retained their focus on expanding European programmes, driven by a succession of Conveners: Dominic Lieven (2001–2004), George Philip (2004–2007), Rodney Barker (2007–2009) and Paul Kelly (2009–2012). During this time, the term 'Convenor' fell into disuse, with the post increasingly being referred to as the Head of the Department. By late 2007, this title was almost the exclusive term for the role throughout the School. The School also detached itself from the University of London framework in 2008,

³⁵ Kelly 2020.

³⁶ LSE 2004: 142, 143, 287; LSE 2019.

³⁷ Kukathas Skype interview 2020.



Figure 18: The LSE Department of Government, 2018; Credit: LSE Library.

which it had been a part of since it was first awarded degree-conferring powers in 1900, allowing the Department to award its own LSE degrees for the first time. Simon Hix took over as Head of Department from Paul Kelly in 2012, continuing the trends that Barry had set out in the early 1990s. Hix worked hard to cement this new ‘positive political science’ vision at the School. Appointed Pro-Director of the School’s research in 2018, Hix continued teaching undergraduates the ‘Introduction to Political Science’ course, which he renamed and restructured from the previous ‘Introduction to Politics’ course to make it more empirical.³⁸ The quantitative and political economy groups in the Department were further bolstered by the arrival of David Soskice from Nuffield College, Oxford, in 2012. He continued to specialise in macroeconomic research, particularly inequality, democracy and the economics of advanced capitalist countries, driving this crucial subdivision of the Department’s research.

One noticeable change in the appointments process during these transformative years was the diversity of candidates and the prominence of women in the Department. Women have a long history at the LSE, which unlike the ancient universities was open to both male and female applicants from its founding. The first female teachers arrived at the School in 1896 when Gertrude Tuckwell, later President of the Women’s Trade Union League, appeared on the faculty

³⁸ Hix interview 2020.

list, giving six lectures on factory legislation. The following year, she was joined by Ellen McArthur and Lillian Knowles, both former students of Girton College, Cambridge, and members of the ‘Steamboat Ladies’: graduates of Oxford and Cambridge between 1904 and 1907 who were refused degrees by their home institutions on grounds of their gender.³⁹ They were advised to take steamboats to Trinity College, Dublin, and have their undergraduate qualifications conferred *ad eundem gradum*—‘at the same degree’—instead. This practice had been common for teachers looking to transfer between universities, but who were not graduates of the college they arrived at themselves. The “political science” (broadly defined) faculty hosted both Beatrice Webb and Ada Wallas from its inception, and in 1921 Lillian Knowles became the LSE’s first female professor, teaching economic history.⁴⁰ Several decades later, Shirley Letwin would become a prominent member of the ‘Oakeshottian Right’. Janet Coleman (starting in 1987) became the first woman to achieve a professorship in the Government Department in 1994. She was elected a fellow of the Royal Historical Society in recognition of her work, and specialised in the history of medieval political thought, co-founding the *History of Political Thought* journal in 1980. Although sometimes a contentious figure, she was a ‘very able scholar’ whose seminars were ‘extremely inspirational’, admired by both colleagues and students alike.⁴¹

However, despite these notable exceptions, women in academic positions were far from the norm for quite some time. Throughout the Department’s history, most of its female employees were secretaries rather than researchers or professors. The workplace culture was still that of an ‘old boys club’ well into the 1980s, where alcohol-based after-office-hours functions were common, and sexual affairs not uncommon. Perhaps the highest profile of these workplace affairs were associated with Michael Oakeshott, known to be charming and rather flirtatious even into his later years. His close friend and colleague at the School, Dr. Anne Bohm, joked that prior to arriving at the LSE he was refused the Mastership of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, because the faculty ‘didn’t want him seducing their wives’.⁴² He would later be found bathing nude at Margate Beach with several women and arrested, requiring the Director of the School to go to the local jail and have him released.⁴³ These snippets of life in the higher departmental echelons paint a small part of a larger picture, revealing what the dominant university culture was at the time. Only with shifts in British educational policy—and the Department’s professionalising trend—did

³⁹ Donnelly 2018a; Donnelly 2018b.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hood telephone interview 2020; Phillips interview 2020; Matravers interview 2020.

⁴² Franco & Marsh 2012: 32.

⁴³ Barr interview 2020.

women begin arriving in significant numbers and become competitors for academic positions.⁴⁴

The new blood in the Department had a marked impact on its image, character, research profile and drive. A surge in appointments had given the political theorists a new, professional direction, moving away from the grand historical approach of the previous decades. The political scientists and public administration specialists reshaped their focus, expanding beyond the old colonial roots of the School to embrace a new, European view. For the first time in its history, women now played a prominent role in the teaching, not just the administration, of political science. The ‘Department in limbo’ had completed its metamorphosis, emerging an altogether different creature.

Moving House

Alongside this shift in the faculty and student composition, another less obvious influence has been the Department’s location. Located in Aldwych, central London, between the Royal Courts of Justice and Westminster, the Department and School has always been well positioned as a centre for the study of politics and government. Christopher Hood and George Jones ran an influential seminar series with senior academics and civil servants, followed by a similar series about the implications of Brexit, run by Tony Travers and Kevin Featherstone.⁴⁵ Patrick Dunleavy also ran several capstone projects with the Bank of England, the Department of International Development and the Financial Conduct Authority which would have been ‘impossible’ without the proximate nature of the Department.⁴⁶

Over the last few decades, the Department has moved within the School three times. Initially, the political scientists had no fixed location, and were dispersed throughout its buildings like the rest of the academic staff. This was in keeping with the founding ideals of the LSE, explored in Chapters 1 and 2: The School was to be a new form of interdisciplinary social science university, where subject and faculty boundaries were almost invisible. However, as departments began to establish themselves as internally autonomous units within the wider School, the political scientists made a gradual move to their first location, with many settling in King’s and Lincoln’s Chambers around the 1950s. The Department moved again in the summer of 2007 to the more modern Connaught House, remaining there until the autumn of 2019, when it took up its present residence on floors three and four of the new Centre Building. Each of these locations had a profound impact, on students and staff alike, and were often representative of the broader transformations in the School’s development.

⁴⁴ O’Leary interview 2020.

⁴⁵ Travers interview 2020.

⁴⁶ Dunleavy interview 2019.

The original move to King's and Lincoln's Chambers came about rather gradually, with the political scientists coalescing on this location as the central hub of their activity within the wider School. The Department itself was not formally located in the buildings, but in the neighbouring East Building, which the School had acquired in 1930.⁴⁷ Back then, its facilities consisted of just a single room, and several rooms adjacent for teaching. The subsequent grouping in King's and Lincoln's grew out of a general attraction of like-minded scholars to the location of key figures, who had chosen to take offices in these spaces.⁴⁸ It was 'a loose collection of people in a primary organisation, called LSE, which was bigger and more significant' than any one Department. Famous figures such as Ken Minogue and Elie Kedourie did not even reside in the buildings. This decentralised, 'higgledy piggledy' structure persisted well into the 1990s and wouldn't truly disappear until the early 2000s.⁴⁹ Offices were often shared with other academics, although unlike the modern Centre Building where junior academics share workspaces, these could be with faculty from any other Department. As mentioned in Chapter 2, John Charvet spent his first year in 1965 cohabiting with a lawyer, which he saw as reinforcing the idea that the School was a 'united band of social scientists', so 'it didn't matter who you were next to'.⁵⁰ The Chambers were also rather run down, emblematic of the Department's informal ethos of 'high thinking in austere conditions' rather than 'making money' or 'changing the world'.⁵¹ 'Intellectually rich but physically poor', one former student recalls.⁵² Brendan O'Leary recalls much the same, describing King's Chambers as a near-derelict building in need of maintenance:

The LSE at that time was a physical slum ... The wallpaper was peeling off the wall, if there was wallpaper. It was damp. It was a health hazard. I put my hands once through a window and, as you can see, my fingers are no longer straight to this day. I broke a finger because I slipped on the staircase. Not because I was lacking sobriety but because the staircases were dangerous.

However, while the Department's first home required significant restoration, it also had a certain 'old-world charm', which made it quite popular with students.⁵³ Matt Matravers, who arrived in the Department as an undergraduate student in 1987, took his seminars on medieval political thought with Janet Coleman in King's Chambers, which he 'absolutely adored'. He recalls that there

⁴⁷ Alexander interview 2020.

⁴⁸ Kelly interview 2020.

⁴⁹ Charvet interview 2020.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Alexander interview 2020.

⁵³ Hood telephone interview 2020.

were two pubs built into the Department, with the Shapiro room located on the first floor as a common room. They took seminars in Janet Coleman's office as there were only 12 students registered for her course.

Janet would put on a filtered coffee machine that would bubble and then she would smoke cigarettes non-stop through the seminar. It was a two-hour seminar. So you sat in all crowded with the coffee maker bubbling and just Janet disappearing behind a wall of smoke after two hours when she just talked about the nature of the good ... If you were nineteen, it was everything you imagined for an intellectual life to be ... The whole thing just had a character.⁵⁴

Others enjoyed the layout of the LSE precisely because it was nothing like a campus with centralised departments, but rather was seamlessly built into central London itself. Jane Headland, a student in the Department in the 1970s, says: 'There was traffic on the road that went through when I was here. You were just in some buildings that were in a corner of London. You didn't have the feeling of being cut off at all ... I'm a city person. I have to be part of my city.'

Yet, for all the Chambers' character and charm, they were not well suited to the demands of modern academic life. The buildings, which had both been founded in 1905, had short, narrow corridors and no means of disabled access. Their condition eventually became so poor that, during the Department's final months there, part of the ceiling of King's Chambers collapsed on Professor Christian List's head. Moreover, the idea of having faculty members dispersed across campus grew increasingly out of fashion, and the lack of disabled access made them increasingly untenable as a home for the political scientists. This, coupled with the Department's growth in size and student and staff demographics changing, meant the Chambers were no longer suitable as a home.

The task of finding a new location fell to Christopher Hood, who proposed a wholesale move from the Chambers to Connaught House during his Convenership. This relocation, which eventually took place under Rodney Barker in 2007, meant that the Government Department now formed part of the main hub of the school, with rooms looking out onto campus.⁵⁵ Connaught House, which was leased to the School in 1966 and purchased in 1989, gave the Department its first real, definitive home. However, for some faculty members, this presented a significant, and sometimes unwelcome, change. Rodney Barker recalls that many took issue with the glass walls of the corridors, which meant people could see into academics' offices. Some put up notices or posters to try and deter unwanted amounts of attention, preventing people from looking in. However, others 'clearly liked' that they were on permanent display, and 'those

⁵⁴ Matravers interview 2020.

⁵⁵ Barker interview 2020.

who wanted to be a bit more civilized about it put up orchids' instead.⁵⁶ The design of Connaught House also made it difficult to build a sense of community and to work together. 'There's lots of secret cut throughs to the Old Building', recall Carla Seesunker and Claire Tomlinson, meaning 'people got lost really easily'.⁵⁷ There was a 'great big stairlift in the middle' with the offices coming off the sides, meaning that 'you often didn't see people'.⁵⁸ As it was a difficult building to get to, often 'a lot of the students didn't know' where the Department was. A long-term solution materialised when the LSE permanently rehoused the Government Department in a new, purpose-built, state-of-the-art facility.

The move occurred in the autumn of 2019, when the School completed construction of the new Centre Building in the heart of the Aldwych campus. The building was a stark contrast to all previous locations, and was initially met with some criticism, especially regarding open office spaces and noise levels. However, the majority of students and staff quickly accepted the Centre Building as their new home. The space provided a more conducive working environment than Connaught House, encouraging and facilitating interaction and collaboration with its wide corridors and open spaces. Claire Tomlinson, the Undergraduate Programmes Administrator for the Government Department, comments:

I felt a change in terms of how much more visible we are, but also how much more visible the students are. And actually, it is nice to see them ... If there's a student you had a conversation on email with, it's nice to then see them later on ... But we also, I think, see a lot more faculty.

Yet, despite the advantages the Centre Building undoubtedly brings, there remains a lingering feeling that something important has been lost from the School's old way of life. With its corporate feel and layout, the Centre Building perhaps represents the final stage in the commercialisation process of the Government Department, and higher education as a whole. In the words of one former alumnus, it's 'a totally different world'.⁵⁹ This is especially true for those who knew King's and Lincoln's Chambers intimately. Professor Matravers recalls that:

In 1987 nothing at the LSE looked like a corporate business. The front entrance was covered with papers, the lifts never worked and a lot of teaching happened in the Old Building, so you would walk in and there were many people trying to wait for lifts or go up and down the stairs, there were posters everywhere. And I think I rather miss these days

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Tomlinson & Seesunker interview 2020.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Headland interview 2020.

when university didn't feel like walking into KPMG and for that reason King's Chambers was a delight.⁶⁰

Upon returning to the School, alumna Jane Headland feels similarly, comparing the Centre Building to the Chambers where she studied:

I didn't know anywhere else in London that was like [the Government Department], whereas now it really could be anywhere in a modern city. At first glance, it really lost its very particular feel ... I am beginning to sense that the modern spaces all look the same ... I am not usually someone who prefers the past, but I think in this case I might do.⁶¹

The history of the Department's location since its inception, from its initial dispersal throughout the School to King's and Lincoln's Chambers, from the Chambers to Connaught House, and from Connaught to the Centre Building, gives the impression of a Department progressing over the years. Its historic, internal struggle between its different component parts—the Old Fabian public administration cohort and rational political scientists rubbing up against the more sceptical Oakeshottian theorists and historians—has played out within their walls. Yet, this touches on another side of the Department's history, one that is entangled in the story of the purpose of a university education. Each move brought the Department closer to its current iteration—perhaps the leading European centre for political science, within one of the foremost social science institutions in the world—yet, each stage also lost something in the process. A certain charm here, a certain eccentricity there, chipping away at the older essence of the School as a community of scholars. While it would be hard to claim this communal feeling has fully disappeared, the Department today projects quite a different image to that of its predecessors. One that has, like many institutions, sacrificed a measure of its character and charm for a more polished, corporate feel. This history of the Department's location is but the most outward and tangible representation of this change.

Conclusion: The Future of Political Science at the London School of Economics

The three decades since 1990 have seen some of the most significant changes in the makeup and structure of the Government Department since students first walked through its doors, some 125 years ago. Adapting to the demands of modern higher education, the Department reformulated itself as a leading centre of political science and public administration, drawing a diverse body of

⁶⁰ Matravers interview 2020.

⁶¹ Headland interview 2020.

students and professors to study from around the world. A new, sharper focus on its strengths and aims restructured its academic specialisations, looking towards a new Europe and an empirical, scientific form of political analysis. Its strengths in theory and philosophy expanded to include new approaches and methodologies, complementing this quantitative drive.

Yet, this period also raises questions about both the nature and the practice of political science, and the idea of a university education itself. One of the most striking criticisms of the new character of the Department since the early 1990s has been the gradual disappearance of a certain informal scholarly atmosphere, replaced by a more sanitised, efficient, professional attitude to political science. This has not just been confined to the LSE, of course. Universities across both Britain and the wider world have experienced a similar event. A far higher number of students now attend university in the United Kingdom, with over 1.9 million attending in the academic year 2018–2019.⁶² This has been accompanied by a five-fold increase in undergraduate degrees awarded since 1990 and steep grade inflation, with a rise in the proportion of Firsts from just 7% in 1994 to 29% in 2019. Masters' degrees are now almost 10 times as common as they used to be.⁶³ As a result, the professional quality and standard of education at top schools demands a certain rigour that departments must match to retain their prestige in the academic market—a factor that is influential in the new marketised world of higher education. The decline of 'the university' as scholar-run space, almost unconcerned with issues like managerialism, institutional image or branding, has gone hand in hand with this drive towards marketisation. A history of the Department sheds light on this internal struggle over the purpose of a university education in 'political science'. What does such an education entail? Should it be driven by explorations of philosophy and history, opening the mind of the student to the various 'languages' of a liberal education, and teaching them to be fluent in them? Or should it be geared towards the more practical, career-related challenges a student faces after university, focused on technical expertise and positive, empirical analysis. Does favouring one side necessarily sacrifice aspects of the other? These are the subtle questions that continue to be asked of political science—and indeed the social sciences as a whole—as they continue to evolve as disciplines. And, for the Department of Government itself, how best can it live up to the hopeful ideal its Founders set for it: to advance the ideals of the Fabians for the betterment of society?

As the Department looks forward to the 21st century, new challenges loom, both near and further out on the horizon. The practical consequences of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, although not yet clear, could be 'extremely serious', posing a threat to the School as a whole.⁶⁴ The Department is well placed to provide expert opinions and research on the subject, which

⁶² HESA n.d.

⁶³ Lambert 2019.

⁶⁴ O'Leary interview 2020.

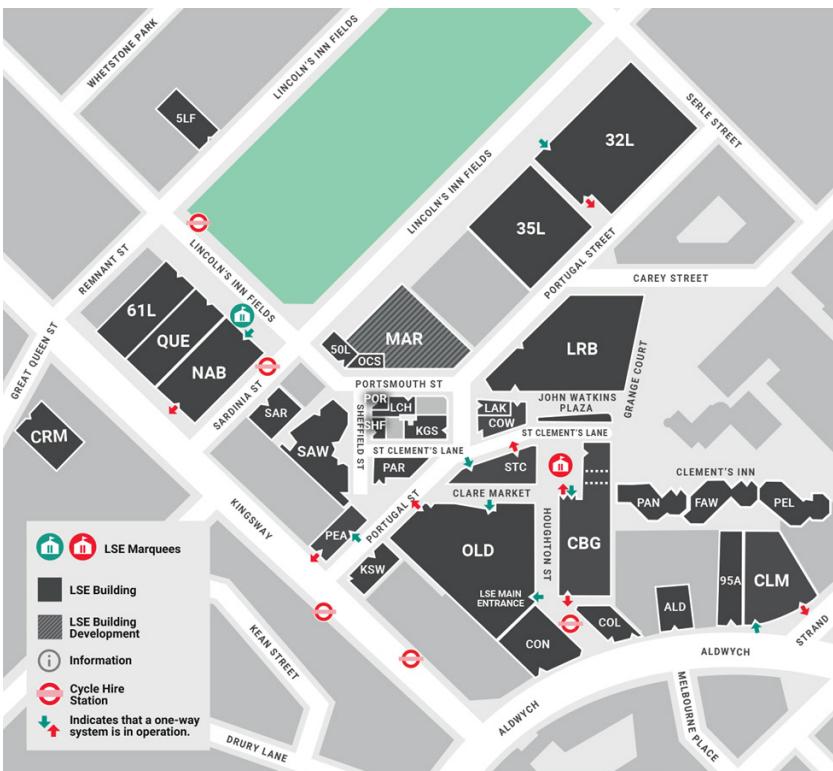


Figure 19: Map of the School, 2019–2020; Credit: LSE Library.

will likely define the next decade of British politics, yet its own future remains uncertain. While London will remain a focal point for international students, whether they can or will want to come after Brexit remains one of the Department's driving, long-term concerns. COVID-19, of course, poses new threats to higher education, driving learning and teaching into virtual spaces since emerging as an international crisis. It is too soon to predict how this pandemic will change the School as a whole, but early indications suggest that it is a challenge as great, if not greater, than that faced at the height of the Second World War. Atop these immediate concerns, the more lasting threat of climate change (e.g. restricting global travel) becomes keener with each new year, forcing itself into the long-term strategies of institutions like the LSE. These events, and the responses taken to them, will shape the future decades of the Department of Government in ways few can reliably predict.

Yet, amid all this uncertainty, there is good reason to believe the Department will not just survive these emergent issues but thrive while addressing them. As a world-class research institution, the LSE is perhaps better placed than other universities to help mitigate the impacts of these new and serious threats

presented by the contemporary world. The School has faced serious challenges throughout its 125-year history, from the World Wars of the first half of the 20th century to the student riots of the late 1960s, while adapting well to the educational reforms of the last four decades. And, despite concerns, it has not just recovered from these challenges, but come back all the stronger having faced them, leading the development of political theory and political science along the way.

Appendix: Conveners and Heads of Department

- Harold Laski, informal head, 1921–1950
- Michael Oakeshott, 1962–66, informal head since 1950
- Harold R. G. Greaves, 1966–1969
- Leonard B. Shapiro, 1969–1972
- Peter J. O. Self, 1972–1975
- Elie Kedourie, 1975–1978
- William Letwin, 1978–1981
- Maurice W. Cranston, 1981–1984
- George W. Jones, 1984–1987
- Kenneth Minogue, 1987–1990
- Gordon R. Smith, 1990–1993
- Brian Barry, 1993–1995
- Alan Beattie, 1995
- Christopher Hood, 1995–1998
- Brendan O’Leary, 1998–2001, first elected Convenor
- Dominic Lieven, 2001–2004
- George Philip, 2004–2007, title of Convenor still in use as of 2006
- Rodney Barker, 2007–2009
- Paul Kelly, 2009–2012
- Simon Hix, 2012–2015
- Chandran Kukathas, 2015–2019
- Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, 2019–2022

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