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# The Emergence of Politics as a Taught Discipline at Universities in the UK

Author: Professor John Craig, Dean of Social Sciences, Leeds Beckett University

Abstract: While existing disciplinary histories of political science focus on areas such as the development of research agendas, establishment of chairs, and the founding of subject associations, little work has been undertaken on the history of teaching and learning.

Based on extensive archival work and use of contemporaneous documents and surveys, it combines data sources, which have not previously been used in writing the history of political science. These are used to construct a history of the taught discipline which traces the development of courses and curricula within UK universities during the twentieth century. In doing so, it makes a significant contribution to the history of political science, challenging existing accounts and chronologies of the development of politics in UK universities, through a more comprehensive account of its diverse origins.

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## Introduction

This paper explores the emergence of Politics as a taught discipline within UK higher education. While there has been a growing interest in the history of politics as an academic subject in recent decades, this has predominantly focused on the evolution of ideas and on institutional developments such as the founding of departments, publication of key texts and the appointment of professors. It has tended to be a history of ‘great men’ and ‘great books’. By contrast, there has been relatively little research on the educational aspects of this development and there has been little written on the emergence of politics degrees. We know little of when they first appeared, what they constituted, who studied them and what they learnt.

The aim of this article is to close some of these gaps. It begins with a review of the existing literature on the history of the discipline in the UK, identifying key themes that have emerged from this scholarship and the gaps relating to the history of the taught discipline. The article then provides a brief history of the development of political science teaching in UK universities. This is divided into two sections, the first covering a period from the nineteenth century through to 1950, and the second focusing on the period from 1950 to 1970. By this latter date, the discipline had become firmly established within UK undergraduate provision. The next section of the paper discusses some of the reasons for

these patterns of expansion and debates on the content of the politics degree. The article then concludes with a summary.

## Politics and Disciplinary History

In recent decades, a significant number of studies have explored the history of political science. Much of this work has focused on the development of the discipline in the United States (for example Ricci 1984; Baer et al 1991; Farr and Seidelman 1993; Sigelman and Sanders 2006), but there has also been work on international developments (such as Coakley 2004), and comparative studies (Easton et al 1991; Easton et al 1995; Adcock et al 2007). Less has been written on the development of the discipline in the UK and as Adcock and Bevir (2005: 1) observed, it is “striking that so little work has been done in Britain on the history of political science in the last forty years”. Johnson (1989) and Hayward (1991) both provide broad surveys, tracing its development from the political economy of the early nineteenth century, to its consolidation as a distinct academic discipline during the twentieth century. For Hayward (1991) this is a story of growing professionalisation, while Johnson (1989: 136) is more critical, arguing that the discipline has been “corrupted by the passing show” of contemporary events and “made esoteric by the pursuit of an inappropriate scientific model”. Other accounts cover shorter periods. Collini et al (1983) and Stapleton (1994) focus on the emergence of the idea of political science within British intellectual life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kavanagh (2003) explores the development of the discipline in the inter-war

period, while Kenny (2004: 569) focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, the period during which, he argues, it transitioned from being a “loosely constituted community into an institutionally accepted academic discipline”.

Other studies explore aspects of this story. King (1977) and Wokler (2001), for example, focus on professorial appointments. There are also studies of politics within single universities. The development of politics at the University of Oxford is explored in Chester (1986) and Hood et al (2014). Both provide narratives which include issues of staffing, estates, funding, research and curriculum, set within wider intellectual and institutional developments. The same is true of accounts of the development of political studies at the University of Edinburgh (Raab 2012) and University of Warwick (Grant 2015), both of which were produced as part of anniversary celebrations. Likewise, the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Political Studies Association (PSA) was marked by a special edition of *Political Studies* in 1975, with papers on the development of the discipline in the UK. A history of the association, published to mark its 60th year (Grant 2010), also provides extensive coverage of key developments in the discipline. There are also surveys exploring the intellectual developments of different sub-fields (Hayward and Norton; 1986; Gamble 1990; Hayward et al 1999).

Together, the existing studies provide a rich account of many aspects of the historical development of the discipline. It is told largely through the establishment of departments and Chairs, the publication of books and journals, and the development of key ideas and research programmes. A number of key events feature prominently in the literature and

form a skeleton history of the discipline in Great Britain. These include the establishment of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 1895, the creation of a Chair in Political Theory and Institutions at the University of Oxford in 1912, and the establishment of an Honours School in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, also at Oxford, in 1920. Various appointments are highlighted such as those of Harold Laski as Professor in Political Science at the LSE in 1926 and W.J.M. Mackenzie as Professor in Government and Administration at the University of Manchester in 1948. The founding of the PSA in 1950 and its Political Studies journal in 1952 are widely held to be key points in the emergence of the discipline, as was the development of post-war research funding for the social sciences. Overall, there is a substantial historical record of the various people and institutions that constituted British political science in its formative years.

An area that is less well covered in these accounts is the teaching of politics. This tends to be covered in a more sporadic fashion, with occasional discussions of degree structures, curricula, numbers of students, and pedagogical techniques. In the case of the University of Oxford, existing studies do provide a reasonably good coverage of key developments. But this is the exception. There is no published work that attempts to provide a wider and more systematic study of the emergence of politics as a taught discipline in higher education during the twentieth century.

Take, for example, the question of when the first single honours degree in politics was taught. There can be debates about what might constitute a politics degree and how this

might have changed over time, but a basic chronology is required as a starting point. The existing literature suggests that single honours politics degrees were first taught in the 1960s. This is explicitly stated by Grant (2010, 6) who refers approvingly to a private communication between himself and Tony Birch, in which Birch recalled that “there were no single honours politics degrees in Britain until the 1960s”. This is consistent with Vout (1990, 163), who states that while “between 1948 and 1957, the study of politics was beginning to emerge, slowly, outside the ‘Thames Valley’ (London, Cambridge, Oxford)... there was no single honours course in politics”. But neither Vout nor Grant propose a date or location for the establishment of the first single honours degree. Likewise, Heater (1969), Dearlove (1987), and Kenny (2004), while all examining aspects of the development of politics within universities in the period, provide no indication of where the first single honours was established. In summary, while there has been a growth in disciplinary history in the UK over the last few decades, there has been significantly less focus on developments relating to teaching and learning and it is this deficit that this article aims to address.<sup>1</sup>

## Method

The writing of disciplinary histories is not without conceptual and empirical challenges. Collini et al (1983: 4) argue that disciplinary histories can impose the structures of later periods on the intellectual debates of former times, and there is the risk that such histories become instrumental, used to legitimise current practices and positions. These are valid

concerns, which I have sought to address through a number of strategies. Firstly, in defining what constitutes ‘politics’ or ‘political science’, the research has relied on contemporaneous uses of the terms, and I have not imposed subsequent definitions.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the account presented identifies debates on the scope and nature of politics as a taught discipline, demonstrating that the course of development was contested and not inevitable. There is also an additional challenge, relating to the changing terminology used across the sector over time. For clarity, in the discussion below, I have used a standardised terms of ‘degree’ or ‘award’ to refer to the whole programme of study that has been designed, and ‘course’ to refer to a part of that (such as a ‘module’ or a ‘paper’). The titles of awards and courses are in inverted commas for clarity.

The process of gathering data was conducted in two stages. During the first stage, a range of existing materials were consulted to construct a high-level national picture of when and where there was prima facie evidence of politics being taught. Three types of source were used to construct this: contemporaneous surveys of the discipline; official records and reports; and the existing histories, such as those noted earlier.

Among the contemporaneous surveys identified were Cole (1950) and Hanson (1952), which were part of a major international survey of political science undertaken by UNESCO. There are also a range of smaller scale surveys and overviews. These include a report by the American political scientist Farlie (1924) and a survey of politics teaching in the mid-1960s, undertaken by Nettl and Simpson (1966) following discussions at an informal conference on emerging issues in the discipline in 1964, and prepared for the



Political Studies Association Annual Conference in 1966 (Jones and Alderman 1965; 392). Tansey (1981) and Berrington and Norris (1988) also provide later surveys of the provision of politics degrees at UK Universities. The reports and records of government and sector bodies are also drawn from a range of sources. From 1926, the University Grants Committee (UGC) collected and published data on the subjects in which honours degrees were awarded to students, and while both the Clapham (1946) and Heyworth (1965) Committee reports were primarily focused on the development of social science research, the latter also collected data relating to teaching provision and student numbers. Data on the development of degrees was also collated from the annual University Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) handbooks, which were published annually from 1962, and provided the fullest record of the awards that were offered by universities in this period.

Together with existing studies of the discipline, these materials provided a series of, sometimes contradictory, snapshots of the discipline and were the starting point for the next phase of the research. This second phase focused on accessing records relating to award structures, curriculum, and student outcomes. Where these exist, they are generally found in university calendars, prospectuses and other publications, held in the archives or special collections of individual institutions. In all, 21 university libraries and archives were visited, as well as the National Archive.<sup>3</sup> Additional documents were accessed through the British Library and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (the successor organisation to UCCA). It should be acknowledged that the records held are not always complete and that they can tell only part of the story. To look at a syllabus is

often to see the end of a process. The discussions, debates, logistical constraints and compromises that produced it are rarely recorded. Nevertheless, sufficient materials are available to shed significant light on the development of politics as a taught discipline.

## The developing discipline: a national picture

This section provides a narrative of the development of politics teaching in British universities. It is divided into two parts. The first deals with developments before 1950. This marks the year when the PSA was founded and proved to be a watershed for the discipline. The second part covers the 1950s and 1960s, during which the discipline developed a stronger sense of identity and further expanded. By the end of this period, politics degrees were firmly established within UK undergraduate education.

### Politics before 1950

As Mackenzie (1967: 57) states “there has always been political science in the universities, since it is impossible to teach law, history, philosophy, theology, or indeed literature... without being drawn into discussions about the polity”. In the United States, Haddow (1969) traces this back to colleges in the colonial period where normative questions relating to political rights and legitimacy were taught within ethics and moral philosophy. In the United Kingdom, Collini et al (1983) explored how the idea of a ‘science of politics’ emerged from the Scottish Enlightenment and became established within university curricula during the nineteenth century. Indeed, the first book published

in English to use the term ‘political science’ in the title, Adam Fergusson’s (1792) *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, was based on his lectures to students at the University of Edinburgh.

These early developments should be placed within the context of intellectual and institutional life in this period. Firstly, although the term ‘political science’ was in use by 1800, it did not constitute a clearly defined and distinct academic field and until the second half of the nineteenth century, the subjects that now constitute the social sciences, generally fell within the scope of what was referred to as ethics, moral sciences and philosophy. As Johnson (1989: 15) has put it “politics was not viewed as a distinctive mode of action or even as a clearly defined structural feature of social life: it was continuous with moral conduct and social regulation”. In this sense, as Collini et al (1983: 3) note, the political science that existed in nineteenth century universities was “only indirectly related to what the twentieth century” came to know by this name. The second contextual aspect relates to the development of universities. During the nineteenth century there were few universities in the UK, with teaching at Oxford and Cambridge dominated by classics and mathematics respectively. While there was growing social pressure for change, it was not until the end of the century that a greater variety of honours degrees became established, and a range of new institutions appeared, offering more alternatives for students.

The first usage of the term ‘political science’ within a degree title that I have been able to identify was at the University of Wales in the 1890s. The University of Wales was

established in 1893, drawing together a number of pre-existing colleges. By the end of the century, both the University College of Aberystwyth (later the University of Aberystwyth) and the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire (later the University of Cardiff) offered a degree in 'Political Science (including economics)'. At Aberystwyth, this was limited to an ordinary degree, first awarded to three students (Robert Jenkyn Owen, Alice Mary Smith, and Caroline Pearse Tremain) in 1898, while at Cardiff, it was offered at honours level and first awarded in 1903 to John Harry Jones (University of Wales 1898: 98; 1905: 196). These were the first students to be awarded a degree by a British university in which the term 'political science' was used. However, as the title of the award suggests, disciplinary boundaries were not clear cut. At Cardiff, students studied courses on 'Politics', which was primarily concerned with the state, and 'Political Theories', which focused on the development of political thought in England. In addition, they studied courses on economic history, and the history of political economy. The prescribed texts were *Leviathan* and *The Wealth of Nations* (University of Wales 1900 xxxi - xxxii). By the end of the decade, the curriculum shifted in the direction of economics and in 1910 the degree was renamed 'Economic and Political Science' (Baber 1983).

Politics also emerged in tandem with economics elsewhere in this period. At the LSE, it formed part of a broad based 'BSc (Econ)' which also included courses on economics, history, public administration, and methods of investigation. Students could choose from a range of identified special subjects at honours level, including 'Public Administration' and the 'History of Political Ideas' (LSE 1903: 51).<sup>4</sup> Both were replaced by a special

subject option in 'Government' from 1930 (LSE 1927: 203-6). At both the University of Manchester and University of Leeds, a 'BA (Hons) in Economics and Political Science' was established. As at the LSE, students were required to study a broad range of subjects as well as the two areas named in the award title. At Manchester (1915: 65), the 'Political Science' component was described as covering "the history of political thought and analytical politics", while at Leeds (1915: 228), students studied 'Political Theory', which covered "the nature and duties of the State and the basis of citizenship".

Politics advanced more slowly and unevenly in the curriculum of the older universities. At Cambridge, 'Political Science' formed part of the 'History' Tripos from the 1880s and political philosophy was taught within the Moral Sciences Tripos (Collini et al, 1983: 345-7). However, while an Economics Tripos was established in 1903, no politics degree was developed until the current century (Tribe 2000: Gamble 2009). At Edinburgh an honours level course on 'Political Science' was approved in 1900 for students studying for degrees in 'History' and 'Economic Science', but the term did not appear in any degree title (Raab 2012: 37-40). Likewise, at Glasgow (1900: addendum; 1901: 75-6), a course on 'Political Philosophy' was introduced for students studying for MA Honours in 'Mental Philosophy' or 'Economic Science' and at Aberdeen (1905: 144-5) a course on 'Political Science' was made a requirement for a degree in 'History', but again the term remained absent from any degree title.

At the University of Oxford things progressed differently. Here political science had become an established element of the syllabus for 'Literae Humaniores' (known as

‘Greats’), ‘Modern History’, and ‘Jurisprudence’ (Ritchie 1891). In 1912, Oxford established what is regarded as the first chair in the discipline at a British university, with the appointment of W.S. Adams as Professor of Political Theory and Institutions (Wokler 2001: 139). This was followed by the establishment of honours in ‘Philosophy, Politics and Economics’, popularly known as ‘Modern Greats’ or by its abbreviation of PPE, in 1920. The new degree required that students studied papers including ‘Moral and Political Philosophy’, ‘British Political and Constitutional History from 1760’, ‘British Social and Economic History from 1760’ and ‘Political Economy’ (University of Oxford 1922).

**Table 1: Subjects in which honours degrees relating to Politics were awarded in UK universities**

Year	Political Science	Economics and Political Science	Social and Political Science	Economics, Politics and History	Philosophy, Politics and Economics
1925/6	5	1	-	-	-
1926/7	5	3	2	-	-
1927/8	12	3	-	-	55
1928/9	13	2	1	-	51
1929/30	10	2	-	-	69
1930/1	7	7	-	-	77
1931/2	11	4	-	-	109

1932/3	10	11	-	-	96
1933/4	14	2	1	3	102
1934/5	11	-	1	1	106
1935/6	12	-	1	6	111
1936/7	6	-	-	3	108
1937/8	20	-	-	5	119
1938/39	13	-	-	4	110

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Source: UGC (1926; 1927; 1928; 1929; 1930; 1931; 1932; 1933; 1934; 1935; 1936; 1937; 1938; 1939)

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As outlined in Table 1, during the inter-war period, PPE had a far higher through-put of students than other degrees classified by the UGC as including politics. The students classified as ‘Political Science’ during this period, were probably the graduates of the BSc (Econ) at the LSE whose Special Subject was ‘Public Administration’ or ‘History of Political Ideas’ and, after 1930, ‘Government’.<sup>5</sup> Farlie (1924, 575) judged that the LSE had become established as the centre of the “largest and most important work in political science in Great Britain”, offering “an imposing schedule of courses on various branches of political science”. Harold Laski, who taught at the LSE at this time concurred, stating that outside the LSE, “there is little attempt at its organised teaching” beyond “a course of

lectures on the government of England, and critical accounts, of widely varying quality and content, of the philosophy of the state” (Laski and Caudel 1925, 97).

But provision was also being developed at other universities in these years. At Oxford, changes to the structure of PPE in 1932 increased the politics content, with additional specialist papers added in ‘Public Administration’, ‘International Relations’, ‘Political Structure of the British Empire’ and ‘Political Theory Since 1760’ (Chester 1986: 43). In 1936, Manchester (1936: 82-4) introduced a ‘Politics’ route in the ‘BA (Hons) Economics and Politics’ which allowed students to develop a greater focus on ‘Political Philosophy’ or ‘Public Administration’ at honours level. Liverpool also introduced a ‘Political Science’ specialism in their BA (Hons) Social Sciences in 1937, with students required to study ‘Public Administration’, ‘International Relations’, ‘British Constitutional History’, and ‘Political Philosophy’ (University of Liverpool 1937: 198-9). Elsewhere, politics was emerging as part of combined degrees. During the inter-war period, the University of Birmingham (1919; 168-174) offered a ‘BA (Hons) Social and Political Science’, while at Queen’s University Belfast (1924: 188) students could study for a ‘BA (Hons) Economics, Economic History and Political Science’, and at St. Andrews (1939: 112-13) honours in ‘Political Science’ were awarded in combination with either ‘Economics’, ‘History’, ‘Philosophy’ or ‘Moral Philosophy’. As such, although by the end of the 1930s there were no single subject honours degrees offered, Politics could be found within the curriculum of most British universities.

## Post 1950



Surveying the post-war scene, Cole (1950: 617) stated “as far as I know, no British University offers a first degree in Politics alone”. His account of politics in British universities is focused almost exclusively on Oxford, where he had been a student of ‘Greats’, taught ‘Modern Greats’ and, at the time that he wrote, held the Chichele Professorship of Social and Political Theory. For Cole (1950: 622), the creation of PPE was an “outstanding achievement in the study of Politics as an element in a wider synthesis relating to modern problems” and while there are passing references to developments in London, Birmingham, and Scotland, the picture presented is of a subject taught in few places. The approach contrast with that of Hanson (1952), which captures more of the breadth and diversity of provision in the sector at the time. Hanson, a Lecturer in Public Administration at the University of Leeds and later its first Professor of Politics, identified 18 institutions offering degrees “which include political science as a major part of their examination requirements” (Hanson 1952: 9).<sup>6</sup> Among these were the University of Nottingham which he identified as the only place where “students can take a first degree described as one in ‘Politics’” (Hanson 1952:1).<sup>7</sup>

Although a Department of Politics was not established at the University of Nottingham until 1965, a ‘BA (Hons) Politics’ degree was offered from 1950. This included courses in ‘Political Institutions’, ‘Political Theory’, ‘British Constitutional History’, ‘Modern British Government’ and ‘Local Government’, as well as a dissertation in the field of ‘Public administration’ (University of Nottingham 1950, 48). There were various adjustments to the curriculum in the years that followed, including the addition of a course in ‘Comparative Politics’ in 1954 (University of Nottingham 1954, 35-6). This

was the first honours degree in the UK, which claimed to provide an education focused on the single discipline of politics. The first graduates (Joseph Ifeatu Emembolu and Frederick Wellesley Jones) were awarded their degrees in 1952, with a further 69 graduates following them by the end of 1964 (University of Nottingham 1958; 1959; 1964). By this time, according to Tolley (2001: 134), it had become a department where “good teaching and pastoral care were emphasised”.

By the time the first UCCA handbook was published (UCCA 1962), Nottingham’s lead had been followed by other universities. In 1952, Exeter and Leicester were University Colleges which Hanson listed as preparing students for the London ‘BSc (Econ)’ and both gained University status later in that decade. From 1956/57 the University of Exeter (1956: 258-62) offered a ‘Government’ special subject route in their BA (Hons) Social Sciences, and Leicester (1958: 183-7) offered ‘Politics’ as a ‘Main Subject’ in their ‘BA Special degree in Social Sciences’ from 1958/9. As noted above, both Liverpool and Leeds had taught politics within combined degrees earlier in the century. From 1960 Leeds (1960: 35) offered the option of ‘Special Studies in Political Studies’ within the ‘BA Social Studies’ degree, while from 1958/59 ‘Political Theory and Institutions’ was offered within the ‘BA (Hons) in Special Studies’ at Liverpool (1958: 213). Finally, within the University of Wales, the University College of Swansea (1961: 122-3) (now University of Swansea), offered honours degrees in ‘Politics’ from 1961/62, also having previously offered joint-honours options. The case of Aberystwyth was rather different. Here a ‘BA (Hons) International Politics’ was offered from 1961/2, but this was

essentially an international relations degree and a separate ‘Political Science’ degree was added in the mid-1960s (University College of Wales Aberystwyth 1961: 23-4).

As identified in Table 2, there was a steady stream of new single honors politics degrees offered through UCCA during the 1960s, and by the end of the decade, about a third of universities were offering a single honours degree in politics.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a further third were offering the subject in either joint degrees or as an identified route within a wider BA or BSc (Econ). It was also not unusual for institutions to change the way in which these were offered to applicants. Aberystwyth, Birmingham, Essex and Leicester all made several changes to the presentation of politics options in UCCA between 1963 and 1969, and Nettle and Simpson (1966: 1), noted that similar awards could be identified “as combined honours [at some universities], while others treated them as special Honours degrees”.

**Table 2: Single or special honours politics courses entering UCCA listings.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Award</b>
<b>of</b>		
<b>Entry</b>		
1963	University College of Wales, Aberystwyth	BA (Hons) International Politics
	University of Exeter	BA (Hons) in Social Science. Government
	University of Leeds	BA in Special Studies. Political Studies

	University of Leicester	BA Special Honours in the Social Sciences. Politics
	University of Liverpool	BA in Special Studies. Political Theory and Institutions
	University of Nottingham	BA with Honours (Social Science). Politics
	University College of Swansea	BA Honours. Politics
1964	University of Strathclyde <sup>a</sup>	BA Political Theory and Institutions
1965	University of Edinburgh	MA Honours. Politics.
	University of Kent at Canterbury.	BA Honours (Social Sciences) Politics
	University of Lancaster	BA with Honours Politics.
	University of Sheffield	BA (Econ) Special Honours. Political Theory and Institutions.
1966	University of Aberdeen	MA Honours Political Studies
	University of Essex	BA Hons Government
	University of Sussex	BA International Politics.
	University of York	BA Politics
1967	University of Reading	BA Politics
	University of Dundee	Honours degree of MA Political Science

	University of Southampton	BSc (Social Science) Politics and International Studies
1968	University of Warwick	BA (Hons) Politics
1969	University of Birmingham	B Soc Sci Honours Political Science

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Source: UCCA (1962;1963; 1964; 1965; 1966; 1967; 1968; 1969)

Notes: The table is cumulative. Awards only included if listed for two consecutive years or more. Subsequent changes in award titles are not included.

[a] Initially listed as Royal College of Science and Technology.

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In part, this reflected on-going questions relating to specialization and the extent to which politics was a suitable subject for a single honours degree. At the start of the 1950s, Hanson (1952:1) had noted:

There is an almost universal opinion that the political subjects, without the support from others, e.g. history, economics, philosophy, sociology or anthropology, cannot provide the undergraduate with a sufficiently wide and balanced course of study.

Despite the growth of single honours provision, such views remained influential during the following decades. For example, Chapman (1970: 73-4) noted that the Department of Government at Manchester had continued to support a “Faculty policy of resisting the introduction of single honours”, taking the view that undergraduate students should become familiar with a range of disciplines before specialising. At Sheffield, Crick (1970: 34) expressed his “continual and open scepticism about the value of single Honours Politics (perhaps Single Honours anything) compared to the value of Dual schools”, having explained in the university prospectus that:

The student taking the Single Subject School of Politics will inevitably gain little knowledge of the main concepts of History, Sociology, Philosophy, Economics and Economic History. But a Dual Subject course with one of these subjects will give most students a better general education and a better preparation for secondary or adult teaching, government service or journalism (University of Sheffield 1968, np).

Such views on the dangers of over specialisation were shared in the sector and resulted in various moves to offer more breadth at both old and new universities. While a single honours politics degree continued to be offered, Sheffield moved to offer more opportunities for students to study a range of social sciences and pursue dual or triple honours. At York, students taking a BA (Hons) Politics initially studied a common social sciences curriculum before confirming their single or combined honours choice. As the

Prospectus outlined, this ensured that “no student embarks on specialised studies within the social sciences unaware of the relationship between his chosen field and the others” and could explore their “aptitude and interests” before committing to a particular field (University of York 1970: 78).

These patterns of provision established in the university sector by the end of the 1960s were to remain relatively unchanged for the next twenty years. When Berrington and Norris (1988: 16) surveyed the scene, they reported “36 universities which offer single subject politics, international relations and public administration degrees in the UK”, and while Tansey (1981: 14) had noted that single honours degree were “dominating the thinking of universities and many university-trained graduates in politics”, they still accounted for “only a small part of Politics curricula in higher education”. This reflected not only the ongoing popularity of joint and combined degrees in the university sector, but also the growth of provision in the polytechnics and other colleges offering higher education. Bristow and Randall (1981: 24-6) identified 37 such institutions offering degrees which included politics. These included 12 “single subject politics degrees”, although reflecting the more applied focus of these institutions, more than half were degrees in ‘Public Administration’. After 1992, the polytechnics were incorporated into the university sector and much of this public administration teaching would disappear, and single honours politics degrees modelled on those found in the older universities were offered.

## Explaining the Emergence of the Taught Discipline

The account provided above maps the growth of politics teaching in universities and has focused on the emergence of single honours politics degrees. This section begins by addressing the question of why the taught discipline emerged at this time, before turning to explore developments in their content and scope.

Four factors can be identified as particularly relevant to the emergence of politics as a taught discipline. The first is the significant expansion of higher education in this period. At the start of the twentieth century there were just ten universities in the current territory of the UK (Tight 2009: 52). By 1948 the number had grown to eighteen and by the end of the 1960s to forty-seven. Although over time they would seek to emulate older universities, the newer universities were often established as innovator institutions, aiming to offer different subjects and advance educational opportunities (Barnes 1996). This was accompanied by an increase in the number of students attending university. Full-time undergraduate numbers increased from under forty thousand in 1945, to over ninety thousand by 1960 and to more than a hundred and eighty-six thousand by 1970 (Tight 2009: 55). Taken together, the rise in the number of students and institutions produced a favourable context for the development of new disciplines.

The second contextual factor was the development of the social sciences. As outlined in an earlier section, economics and politics had entered the university curriculum in the later nineteenth century. However, these subjects were generally subsumed within faculties of arts or seen as an aspect of commercial education. As King (1997) argues,



this began to change due to wartime experiences of planning and the post-war commitment to an expanded welfare state. The Clapham Committee (1946) had recommended expanding support for the provision of social sciences in the universities and during the following decade the UGC provided increased funding and moved to recognise the social sciences as a distinct set of disciplines. Their status was further enhanced by the Heywood Committee (1965) which established the Social Sciences Research Council (later renamed the Economic and Social Research Council). In addition, post-war social science provision was developing in secondary education, with the introduction of A-level qualifications in areas such as economics, politics, and sociology (Stewart 1989: 150-1).

While these developments provided a fertile environment for the development of politics as a discipline, it was not a foregone conclusion that this would emerge as a standalone area of undergraduate study. We have noted the views of leading figures such as Hanson and Crick, who were sceptical of the value of single subject politics degrees. Likewise, shortly after taking up the chair in Political Theory and Institutions at the University of Liverpool, Wilfred Harrison (1957: 221) thought it unlikely that “political studies will succeed in many British universities in forming the centre in an honours school around which other subjects will be grouped”.

This brings us to student behaviour as the third explanatory factor. As Mandler (2015) argues, this was a key driver within universities during the twentieth century due to the demand led nature of the British higher education system. As Thompson (1969: 65)

noted, secondary school students were often “fascinated by political controversies like civil rights in Northern Ireland, Vietnam, ‘student power’ or immigration”. To increasing numbers, studying a social science at university appeared an attractive choice “not only because it seemed exciting and ‘relevant’ but also because it seemed good preparation for careers in local government, social work, commerce and management” (Mandler 2015: 412). This latter point was often highlighted to applicants by universities in their publications. For example, as the University of Exeter (1966: 405), explained degrees in government could “provide an excellent background for those whose careers may be in central or local administration at home or overseas, or in politics, as well as in some branches of teaching”. Indeed, an analysis of UGC data by Lovenduski (1981: 14) demonstrated that between 1966 and 1975 the most common destination for politics graduates were industry and commerce, local government, hospitals and the civil service.

The fourth factor was the behaviour of universities, and they responded in different ways to this growth in student demand. It is noticeable that those with the most successful joint or combined politics provision and the strongest research profiles (Oxford, LSE, and Manchester) chose not to establish single honours in the subject. Instead, this was led either by institutions that had recently gained university status (such as Nottingham, Exeter and Leicester) or those that had long-standing joint honours provision but were seeking to expand (such as Liverpool and Leeds). In many ways, this echoed the experience at the start of the twentieth century, when developments in joint and combined politics degrees were led by the new English civic universities and Welsh university colleges, rather than the ancient universities. In both cases, it is likely that institutions

with well-established provision had both less incentives to innovate, as well as more interest in maintaining existing structures.

We now turn to consider the changing scope of the politics curriculum during the post-war expansion. The rapid growth in provision gave rise to concern that there was a lack of consistency between degrees variously described as ‘Politics’, ‘Political Studies’, ‘Political Theory and Institutions’ and ‘Government’ (Crick 1966; 631), although Wiseman (1967: 1) judged that all these were “virtually synonymous”. For Nettl and Simpson (1966: 3) the “equivalence of different courses” was the “most urgent question” for the discipline, but they found a considerable degree of commonality, with ‘Modern Foreign Government’, ‘Social and Political Philosophy’ and ‘British Government’ as the most commonly required courses, a pattern that was most pronounced among degrees identified as single honours.

However, beneath this apparent consensus, there were on-going processes of change and debate. This has often been characterised as a conflict between an older approach to political studies, based firmly in the traditions of philosophy and history, and a modern approach to the subject, conceptualised more explicitly as a social science and influenced by intellectual currents such as behavioralism (Dearlove 1987; Johnson 1989; Vout 1990; Hayward 1991; Kenny 2004). This was certainly one aspect of the debates within the discipline during this period. Jones and Alderman (1965: 392) noted the “widespread dissatisfaction” expressed at the informal conference in 1964, with what was characterised as an insufficiently conceptual and analytical approach to the subject. For

Preece (1969: 472) conflicts within departments between traditionalists and modernists risked having an adverse influence on teaching, while for Chapman (1970: 73), “the main teaching problem” was “how to marry the traditional disciplines of political theory, law and philosophy with the newer branches of study”.

While Dearlove (1987: 129) argues that a relatively uncritical approach to the British political system, focusing “on formal political structures and not political behaviour”, remained in place throughout the 1960s, for Dowse (1967: 126) the taught discipline changed significantly with “a veritable revolution” taking place in the courses offered to students. An inspection of university calendars and prospectuses during this period, demonstrates a widespread process of change, but variation between institutions. Both Essex and Strathclyde, which were recognized as departments that embraced behaviouralism more fully than others, emphasized the methodological focus of their politics degrees. Essex (1964: 13) stated that “students will engage in practical work involving the use of interviewing techniques and statistical methods” and highlighted the opportunities to undertake advanced courses in mathematics as part of the degree, while Strathclyde (1969: 51), outlined to applicants, that their politics degree provided “an unusual opportunity to acquire general Social Science skills, including expertise in survey work and in the use of computers, as well as a liberal education in evaluating problems involving a mixture of values and empirical data”. In other cases, courses were offered which introduced students to the more recent theoretical approaches. At Edinburgh (1964: 465) and Sussex (1964: 58), students were required to study courses on political sociology, which explored issues such as “social groups and political behaviour”,

“pressure groups and parties” and “opinion and its measurement”. In the case of Edinburgh, a list of recommended readings was included, which was dominated by key American behaviouralist texts. At Liverpool (1964: 75) optional courses were offered on ‘Political Parties and Pressure groups’ and ‘Elections and Representation’, while Nettl and Simpson (1966: 4) noted the use of courses on ‘Political Science’ at some institutions to achieve the same end. The general pattern was one of an accommodation through an expansion of the curriculum.

In part, these diverse patterns of change reflected the relatively eclectic character of the discipline in Britain during this period. Crick (1966: 682) estimated that, almost two thirds of those teaching politics had completed a BSc (Econ) or History degree, while about a sixth had taken PPE. While these experiences no doubt influenced their approach to the subject, those writing about their intellectual development during this period, typically refer to a multiplicity of influences (see for example Barry 1980, Finer 1980 and Miller 1980). In addition, Goldsmith and Grant (2007: 382) observe, that while Chester, Mackenzie and Harrison were dominant figures in the post-war discipline, each was “more interested in stimulating students and colleagues into opening up new areas of work and trying out new ideas” than imposing a single approach. As such, the trends towards greater professionalization, did not necessarily impose greater conformity.

Bevir and Rhodes (2007) have also challenged the focus on a binary opposition of modernist versus traditionalist approaches. They highlight both the extent to which newer approaches were absorbed and co-opted into on-going debates, and the continuing role of

other traditions, such as socialism and idealism, within British political studies. Such processes can also be identified in the debates around the curriculum. The concern that the institutional side of the subject could be untheoretical and overly descriptive was not entirely new and could be found in the older political studies tradition. Cole (1950: 629) had argued that if the philosophical aspect was neglected, students studying institutions could “achieve examination success by the sheer accumulation of information and by commonsense collation of it, without the need to show much grasp of theoretical issues”. Likewise, when Miliband (1975) criticized approaches to the teaching of political science which focused on political systems without reference to underlying structures of social and economic power, this was directed at both the traditional political studies curriculum and the positivist neutrality of behavioural approaches.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, debates around behaviouralism were not the only factors influencing change in the curriculum during this period. For example, the introduction of courses on the politics of European integration (Nottingham 1965: 42; and Aberystwyth 1968: 99) and the politics of developing areas (Leeds 1968: 88; and York 1969: 82-3), reflected contemporary political issues. These broadened not just the geographic scope of the discipline, but also widened the range of theoretical approaches and the issues that were discussed. Nevertheless, the core identified by Nettl and Simpson (1966) was to remain in place, and at the start of the 1980s Tansey (1981: 15) could still refer to “a ‘Holy Trinity’ of British Politics, Political Theory or Philosophy, and Comparative Politics (based on the UK, USSR, France and USA)” as central to most degrees in politics.

## Conclusion

This article provides a history of the development of politics as a taught discipline in UK universities. In doing so, it explores an aspect of disciplinary history that has received little attention in the existing literature. It is based on research that has accessed and synthesised multiple data sources, which have not previously been brought together. As a result, it provides a more systematic account that captures developments at a wider and more diverse range of institutions than previously explored. In contrast to the existing literature, it highlights the wide extent of politics teaching within the sector in the first half of the twentieth century and places the date for the emergence of the first single honours politics degrees in the 1950s, rather than the 1960s. It demonstrates that by the end of the 1960s, single honours politics degrees were an established element of the higher education landscape with a common core curriculum.

However, this picture is far from being a story of the triumph of single honours politics. As Adcock, Bevir and Stimpson (2007: 3) have argued, disciplinary histories should “unpack the contingent origins of dominant traditions, recover alternative traditions... or question the naturalizing histories by which practitioners of a discipline legitimate their own approaches”, and what is apparent in this study is the extent to which the emergence of politics as an independent area of education was not expected and then resisted by some leaders in the profession.. Indeed, during the period in which single honours politics degrees became established and widespread, they were part of a wider eco-system in which politics contributed to a range of combined and joint degrees. As such, the article

highlights the value of research on the development of the taught discipline as an essential, if hitherto under researched, element of political science disciplinary history and opens the way for further research in this area.

## Notes

1. Some material has been published on the development of other social sciences as taught disciplines. Fincham (1975) provides a detailed account of the emergence of sociology degrees in England, while Kadish and Tribe (1993) cover aspects of the development of economics education. Haddow (1969) provides a history of the development of politics degrees in the United States from the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century.

2. The terms 'politics' and 'political science' have been used interchangeably for much of the period discussed. The term 'Government' has also been used for departments and award titles, but as demonstrated in the UGC returns discussed below, this could also be interchangeably.

3. Aberystwyth; Bradford; Bristol; Cardiff; Edinburgh; Exeter; Glasgow; Keele; Leeds; London; London School of Economics; Liverpool; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queens Belfast; Sheffield; Strathclyde; St. Andrews; York.



4. The first graduate of the 'BSc (Econ) special subject Public Administration' was first awarded to George Thomas Reid in 1906, while the 'BSc (Econ) special subject History of Political Ideas' was first awarded to Edwin Evelyn Housley in 1914 (LSE 1934: 89 and 158)

5. UGC reports do not identify which honours degrees were awarded at which universities. However, the number of graduates from these specialist routes reported by the LSE for each year between 1926 and 1938, match those reported in the UGC reports for each year (LSE 1925-6 - 1939-40)

6. For context, at this time there were only 18 universities in the UK. Hanson's list includes a number of institutions that did not hold university status at that time. The only universities that Hanson does not identify as having significant politics teaching are: Cambridge; Edinburgh; Manchester; Liverpool; Belfast; and Reading.

7. The University of Glasgow is listed by Hanson as offering an 'MA (Hons) in Politics', which in the context of Scottish Universities is an undergraduate degree. Inspection of university calendars for the period show that Politics first appeared as a distinct area for study as honours level in 1949, but students were required to study this in combination with either 'Moral Philosophy' or 'Political Economy' (University of Glasgow 1950). As such it was not a single honours degree.

8. The 12 institutions listed in Table 2 as recruiting students to start degrees in 1965, is more than the 7 identified by Nettl and Simpson (1966: 3). The difference is accounted for by gaps in the Nettl and Simpson data set. Aberystwyth is listed as not responding to the survey, while Kent and Lancaster were among a group of universities not sent a questionnaire as they were not expected to establish provision so quickly. Nottingham and Strathclyde appear to have returned questionnaires but were not included in the table of degree structures by Nettl and Simpson. No reason is given for this. There are no cases in which I have identified a university as offering single honours politics, if they were classified otherwise by Nettl and Simpson.

9. Indeed, an on-going debate would be pursued for some decades about whether British politics textbooks had sufficient theoretical content (see Epstein 1987; Robins 1996; Smith 1999; Jones and Robins 2000).

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