

## STATEMENT ON SOCIOLOGY, THE BSA AND HE CUTS

### HE cuts and their broader context

Several different developments have got labeled under the heading of 'cuts', some of which are not cost cutting measures in the literal sense.

- a) Increases in the cap on student fees in England (Wales has determined it will not raise fees for Welsh students, at least in the short term, Scotland currently subsidises Scottish students but it is unsure whether this will continue to the same degree, and Northern Ireland has not determined its response to the Browne Report)
- b) The elimination of public funding for most non-STEM subjects, and thus the ending of the public university for the humanities and social sciences
- c) Comprehensive spending review (CSR) cuts across HE, including in HEFCE, HEA subject area centres, the universities' block grant, research council monies, etc.
- d) The concentration of resources in increasingly privileged sectors of HE, such as ESRC PhD quota, research council awards, QR monies and the like
- e) The narrowing and intensification of the audit culture in HE which prioritises 'impact' and 'economic' utility in the social science at the expense of their wider public value

This is not a comprehensive list or set of examples.

### The BSA's approach

The BSA has been working closely together with the UK Council of Heads and Professors of Sociology (HaPS) and together we believe that there is an imperative to respond to the current confluence of events not just by declaring what we are against, but restating what we believe in.

The principles we seek to fight to protect are set out below.

#### *Teaching:*

1. *The recognition that all areas of higher education are 'high priority' and are deserving of public funding.*
2. *That research informed teaching distinguishes a university education from vocational or non-University private providers.*
3. *That the research component of teaching needs to be recognised and supported in statements about the funding of undergraduate courses (whether by public contribution or student fee contribution).*

#### *Research:*

1. *We campaign for the recognition of the importance of social science research.*
2. *We argue against concentration and selectivity.*
3. *We argue to retain the balance of QR to Research Council Funding.*

The BSA has concentrated its efforts in five areas:

1. Campaigning to demonstrate the public value of sociology
2. Supporting the Academy of Social Science's (AcSS) Campaign for Social Science (CfSS)
3. Responses to the Browne Report on fees and the CSR cuts
4. Supporting the campaign for the retention of the public university
5. Renewing its vision statement on the purpose of sociology and what the BSA stands for (to add to those things which it is against in the current HE climate)

The first two are long term and involve a breadth of activity that predated the immediate crisis motivated by Browne and the CSR. The BSA has thus a series of short term measures and longer term policies in place, as well as renewing its commitment to certain key values and purposes which it believes are worth defending.

### **Structural adaptation in the BSA to meet the present conjuncture**

The BSA has a dual quality. It is a membership-based Association that needs to provide members with an opportunity for input and expression, but also a learned society that sometimes requires strong direction and firm agenda setting. It is also a very diverse body with a huge variety of bureaucratic tasks that need to be successfully accomplished if it is to reproduce itself. This can preclude sufficient attention being focused on external affairs.

The BSA has made two key institutional adaptations in reaction to current circumstances.

#### *a) Strong direction and leadership in external affairs*

The BSA had foresight enough to anticipate the likelihood of profound changes in the HE landscape over the next decade or so and ahead of Browne and the CSR, the BSA recognised the need to change its structure to facilitate better and quicker responses to changing circumstances.

In 2009 this involved changing the job description of the President to give the role a much greater external focus, coupled with an extension of the term of tenure to three years in order to develop a sustained strategy of public engagement.

This has also involved, on the initiative of the President, forming an External Affairs Group of senior BSA Council members and officers to lead the BSA's thinking and policies. It comprises the President (John Brewer), Chair (Rob Mears), Vice Chair (Judith Burnett), Chief Executive Officer (Judith Mudd), a former President on Council (John Scott), Head of HaPS (John Holmwood) and a co-opted member from the general membership (Les Back). Membership crosses the key pre- and post-1992 divide and includes people from the BSA's Executive Management Team, the main financial body with oversight over the whole Association.

#### *b) Membership engagement and input*

The BSA has an excellent reputation for consulting members. The Association's newsletter *Network* and the regular electronic Bulletin are used for purposes of communication. There have been two consultations by the President, for example, on the 'impact' debate. The BSA website has a section devoted to members' contributions to the impact debate, allowing members to submit information, case examples, and read resources and reports that have been uploaded by the Association. The development of a blog dedicated to 'Sociology and the Cuts', both as a reference resource and a place for members to comment reflects our desire to facilitate further engagement and input.

<http://sociologyandthecuts.wordpress.com>

### **BSA activities in response to the present conjuncture**

We can itemise activities in the five areas in which the BSA is working. This will not be comprehensive but is indicative of BSA efforts.

#### *a) Responses to Browne and CSR*

*Public letter campaign:* Two letters from the President have been published in the *Times Higher Education*. The first was on Browne and the privatization of public education

(individual letter), the second on the negative effects of closing the HEA subject centres (joint letter from Presidents of relevant learned societies). A third was published in the *Times* (joint letter as part of the Campaign for the Public University), signed by the President, Head of HaPs and other BSA members (and others besides). An email by the President was sent to the Vice Chancellors of Russell Group universities complaining at their silence and asking for a defence of the public university (joint letter as part of the Campaign for the Public University). Other BSA members also wrote emails (and others besides) Copies of these letters were printed in the current issue of *Network* (and will be uploaded to the blog).

*Private diplomacy:* The BSA has twice put it to AcSS that AcSS begin a letter campaign to social science Vice Chancellors to encourage them to make stronger public criticism of the hike in the fee cap. This is to be put to the meeting of CEOs of affiliated learned societies in January. The President has suggested to the Head of HaPS (both of whom are members of the BSA's external affairs group) that its active membership, which is mostly managers in university academic units, write to their VCs to do the same.

*Working with other constituencies:* The BSA's External Affairs Group (EAG) has sought to mobilise sociologists in other associations and groupings. For example, John Scott, a Fellow of the British Academy and a member of the EAG, has suggested that the sociology section of the British Academy utilise their influence within the Academy against privatisation, which the section head, Colin Crouch, wholeheartedly supports. The President of the BSA recommended that those of its members who are Academicians in AcSS form a grouping as a special lobby within the AcSS to the same end, and this is in a fledgling stage. The BSA has reinstated its policy of making nominations of its members as Academicians in order to increase the profile of sociology in the Academy and increase the BSA's lobbying power. In December 2010 four new nominations were made. The BSA currently has 85 members in the Academy's 722 Academicians, although there are other sociologists who are not BSA members.

*Information hub for members:* Through *Network*, and e-news, the BSA website and BSA Facebook, the BSA draws members' attention to what is happening at a local level (for example, the coverage of the staff cuts at Birmingham). The dedicated website devoted to the cuts will reinforce the BSA's role as an information hub and resource for use locally. We have asked members to supply information on local situations so that we can all be better informed. As part of the BSA's role as an information hub, the Annual Conference has for the last few years organised 'professional and management' events, such as sessions on the ESRC International Benchmarking Exercise and the ESRC's proposed postgraduate framework. In 2011 we intend to organise a series of events related to the current crisis affecting HE.

#### b) Supporting the Campaign for the Public University

Two of the driving forces of this campaign are on the BSA Council – Gurminder Bhambra and John Holmwood – and many BSA members and officers are signatories to the campaign, including the President. As noted above, the President has participated in their letter campaign, as will have other BSA members, and wrote separately to the *Times Higher Education* protesting the privatisation of higher education.

#### c) Supporting the AcSS's campaign for social science

The BSA's membership rose by 10 percent last year to reach 2228. AcSS membership through affiliated bodies stands at 85,000. The AcSS is a larger and more effective body than the BSA, not just in size and influence but also because it carries the voice of all the learned societies in the social sciences. The BSA believes there is no merit in duplicating AcSS's activities in minor key. The AcSS has better connections with policy makers,

politicians and government personnel and can utilise more effective networks. The influence of the social science community is much smaller than the humanities for historical and practical reasons but would be made even more dilute without liaison with other learned societies through AcSS. The BSA tries, however, to ensure it maximises its position with the Academy and increases its influence within it.

The AcSS campaign for social science takes two forms: a) its strategy to demonstrate the public value of social science research through the 'Making the Case for Social Science' campaign, which has been running since 2008-9; b) the CfSS initiative established in response to Browne and the CSR, to be officially launched on 20 January 2011 by Lord Giddens.

*Making the Case for Social Science.* In a series of meetings in 2008-9 with a dozen organisations, including the BSA, the Chief Government Social Scientist, Professor Paul Wiles, said the government wanted to see strengthened lobbying from social science organisations. The BSA used this to offer a leading voice within the AcSS. In 2009 a small group of CEOs from affiliated learned societies within the Academy formed an action group which commissioned a report on campaigning ahead of budget cuts and was instrumental in persuading the AcSS to develop a campaign. The action group included the BSA's Judith Mudd. The pressure resulted in the Academy's 'Making the Case for Social Science' campaign. This is actively supported by the BSA via the 'Impact' work led by the BSA President. The BSA, through its members, delivered the greatest number of responses for the Making the Case campaign, which helped enable the Academy to deliver the Making the Case series of booklets which are now being produced at regular intervals, being launched at events to which key civil servants, policy advisors, and MPs are being invited and attending. The BSA continues to gather information about the value of social science.

*Campaign for Social Science (CfSS).* The BSA and HaPS have made separate private representations to AcSS to accelerate the launch. The paradox is that AcSS does not have the resources ahead of the fund-raising campaign to do this (it has only two full-time staff). The BSA has donated £5000 to the AcSS's fighting fund and is in diplomatic discussions through AcSS with other leading social science learned societies to match this sum. The BSA was the first learned society to step forward. We have also communicated to AcSS that the BSA is prepared to offer its EAG as a resource to act as a sounding board and to help with campaign planning. The AcSS's campaign team includes Tony Crook, Paul Wiles, Kate Barker, Robert Upton, Michael Harlow. The BSA's offer of help extends to any assistance AcSS feels it needs from the BSA's press officer, Tony Trueman, although the BSA's former press consultant, Ivor Gabor, is an Academician and he is taking most of the responsibility for press coverage. AcSS intends to hold a series of regional roadshows, some of which are being organised with the assistance of BSA members and officers (for example, at Aberdeen).

d) Campaigning to demonstrate the public value of the sociology

*The work of the BSA President*

The BSA tasked the President to develop a campaign to demonstrate the public value of sociology. This has seen the development of Presidential Events in the British Library to demonstrate the relevance of sociological research to some of the major public issues affecting human kind. These are designed as networking occasions for academics, politicians, civil servants, journalists and NGO activists discuss sociological research. The first was on the sociology of climate change (January 2010) and second (January 2011) is on international migration. Presidential Sessions are now held at the Annual Conference: in 2010 on religion and violence (Johan Galtung), in 2011 on the theory-practice divide (Walby). The President initiated a debate on impact within the BSA and has a busy schedule of meetings at the British Academy, HEFCE and AcSS on the topic. The President has also agreed to write a volume in the Bloomsbury Press series on the public value of the social sciences, to appear in 2012.

### ▼ *The work of the BSA press officer and journalist*

The BSA's press officer and professional journalist, Tony Trueman, was employed deliberately to work on public engagement. This move has resulted in a change from a handful of (often very negative) articles in the media about sociological research to literally hundreds of positive reports over the first year. This strategy has also transformed *Network* into *the* print magazine for sociology in Britain. Tony Trueman has written many pieces of his own on the public relevance of sociology. A notable example was a feature in *Network* on sociology and the 2010 general election. Another is the interviews he did with HE Minister David Willetts and Stephen Williams MP. Tony Trueman is also responsible for feature articles and interviews in *Network* on practitioner sociologists and sociologists outside academia. It is worth noting here that within two years of its formation, the Sociologists Outside Academia Group in the BSA is nearing 500 people on its mailing list and is very active in linking academic and practitioner members.