



British Philosophical Association

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cc: Rt. Hon. Lord Sheppard of Didgemere, Prof. Edward Esche, Prof. Margaret House, Prof. Waqar Ahmad

30 April 2010

Dear Professor Driscoll

I am writing to you on behalf of the British Philosophical Association, the Australasian Association of Philosophy, and the American Philosophical Association concerning the recent announcement that Middlesex University is to close its Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, along with all undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in philosophy.

We are very disturbed, both at the decision itself and at the rationale behind it.

CRMEP has an outstanding reputation for research, both within the UK and internationally. It is unquestionably one of the leading centres for continental philosophy in the UK, achieving a 5 in the 2001 RAE and a GPA of 2.8 in the 2008 RAE – the same as Leeds, Nottingham and Edinburgh and better than (for example) Warwick, Sussex, Durham and Glasgow.

We understand that the Dean, Professor Esche, told staff that CRMEP's high research reputation makes no 'measurable' contribution to the University. This claim is simply not true. In financial terms, the Centre's QR funding amounted (according to HEFCE figures) to over £150,000 in 09-10.

But of course direct financial contributions are not the only consideration. CRMEP is surely one of Middlesex's best-performing academic units in research terms. This brings with it a huge boost in research reputation for the University as a whole – something that new universities often struggle to achieve. One symptom of CRMEP's high research reputation is its very healthy recruitment to MA courses; we understand that 42 new MA students were recruited in 2009, a figure that almost all philosophy departments in the UK would be extremely envious of.

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A further consideration is surely the immense damage that will be done to Middlesex as an institution by closing an academic unit with an excellent research reputation and healthy postgraduate numbers, and increasing undergraduate applications. Prospective students – both undergraduate and postgraduate – will worry whether their chosen department will be next on the list, and prospective permanent staff will not regard Middlesex as a place where their job is safe.

We are also concerned about the rationale given for the decision to close CRMEP. We understand that the decision has been made on a purely financial basis. While of course we appreciate that universities are suffering financially at the moment, from what we can gather the Centre is only 2% off its target contribution of 55% of gross income to the central administration.

This is a very small shortfall, and one would normally expect that the problem could be dealt with in other, less draconian ways; particularly given that the Centre has all the hallmarks of long-term viability: an excellent research reputation, astonishingly good PGT recruitment, and increasing undergraduate applications.

Normal procedure – and certainly best practice – in circumstances where the closure of an academic unit is being considered is to have a full-scale review of the unit, with both internal and external expert panel members. Middlesex does not appear to have conducted such a review – something which, again, damages its institutional reputation and, perhaps more importantly, suggests that perhaps all the options have not been fully considered.

We urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to conduct such a review, so that all the options can be considered fully.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Helen Beebee, Director, British Philosophical Association

and on behalf of:

Prof. Paul Humphreys

Chair, American Philosophical Association Committee on International Relations

Prof. Graham Oppy

Chair, Australasian Association of Philosophy

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