

## *The Profession in Politics and International Studies*

# Women in the Profession: The Composition of UK Political Science Departments by Sex

Stephen Bates and Laura Jenkins

*University of Birmingham*

Zoe Pflaeger

*University of Sussex*

This article outlines the composition by sex of political scientists in the UK. The data show that there are fewer women working in the profession than men and that there is a 'seniority sex gap'. The data are then broken down in terms of university membership groupings and individual departments in order to produce snapshot rankings. These rankings are then combined to produce an overall ranking of female presence within UK political science departments. Our findings suggest that a 'leaking pipeline' persists and that numerical and seniority inequality will continue for a considerable time unless further action is taken.

**Keywords:** profession; political science; status; women

This article updates and builds upon some aspects of similar previous research and surveys which concentrate on the presence of women within British political science (see, for example, Akhtar et al., 2005a and 2005b; Bennie and Topf, 2003; Berrington and Norris, 1987; Childs and Krook, 2006; Norris, 1990; Topf, 2009). This literature identifies that women are underrepresented within the discipline and attempts to offer some explanations as to why this is the case. For example, Parveen Akhtar et al. (2005b) point towards four factors that inhibit women from pursuing postgraduate research in political science: stereotyping; (lack of) role models; family commitments; and time constraints. Yet, literature in this area that focuses on the UK is not as developed as the literature that focuses on the US (see, for example, APSA, 2005; Assendelft, Gunther-Canada and Dolan, 2001; Assendelft et al., 2003; Brandes et al., 2001; Burton, 1979; Burton and Darcy, 1985; Committee on the Status of Women, 1992; Converse and Converse, 1971; Finifter, 1973; Henehan and Sarkees, 2009; Jaquette, 1971; Maliniak et al., 2008; Schuck, 1969; Tolleson-Rinehart and Carroll, 2006) and, even here, 'Political science has studied itself with respect to women's advancement far less than economics, sociology, and a number of the hard sciences' (APSA, 2005, p. v).

Developing the literature on the status of women in political science in the UK and more widely is important for issues of equality, justice and disciplinary self-



reflection. The gender pay gap and women's inequality and underrepresentation in positions of authority, power and influence (whether in parliamentary politics, business, the legal sector, media and culture or the public sector) are important political issues and are recognised as such (see, for example, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011). As the academy exercises a degree of authority and control over the flow of information and creation of knowledge within society, academic positions (in political science) should be regarded similarly. A number of authors have highlighted residual issues with exclusion and parity within the university sector (see, for example, Akhtar et al., 2005b; APSA, 2005; Bagilhole and Goode, 2001; Fogelberg et al., 1999; Kantola, 2008; Lie and Malik, 1996) by identifying a lack of women within senior academic posts, inhospitable institutional climates, structural factors (for example, those surrounding family and childcare) that hinder women's career aspirations within universities, problems with the reception of work on gender, and higher numbers of women who abandon the academy. These matters should perhaps be particularly prominent internally within political science given that issues of sex and gender inequality are so well established as an area of sub-disciplinary research. It is maintaining and increasing the prominence of issues surrounding the status of women within the discipline that is one of the aims of this article.

The article sets out the percentage and seniority of male and female political scientists working in UK universities both overall and by each UK department in which political science and/or international relations is taught. These indicators are then combined to provide an overall ranking of departments in terms of female presence. The term 'female presence' should not be confused with notions of 'women-friendliness', as this article concentrates on issues of numerical (in)equality and cannot be used unproblematically to comment on the working environment within which female political scientists operate. The data on female and male academics are also compared to data that set out the percentages of male and female undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate students between the years 1994 and 2009. The data reveal that women make up less than a third of political scientists working in the UK. Although this demonstrates a significant improvement over the last two decades, the data also reveal three other findings which are less encouraging and suggest that issues remain that deserve attention. First, there is a significant 'sex gap' in terms of professional seniority. Second, a 'leaking pipeline' of prospective female political scientists exists (albeit to a lesser extent now than previously) which means that women are more likely than men to drop out of the discipline or choose alternative careers (see APSA, 2005). Third, there is some evidence that female political scientists pool at the level of teaching or research fellow and find it more difficult than their male counterparts to gain lectureships.

Data were collected from public political science departmental websites listed on the PSA website (<http://www.psa.ac.uk/PolDept>) in July and August 2011.<sup>1</sup> This meant that 77 institutions were analysed.<sup>2</sup> For multidisciplinary departments such as the University of the West of England's Department of History, Philosophy and Politics, only political scientists and international relations scholars were included in the analysis. Decisions about which academics to include from these types of department were made through (a combination of) job title, research interests, teaching

areas and publications. Each academic was coded in terms of whether they were male or female and their job title (four categories of: (1) teaching/research fellow; (2) lecturer/senior research fellow; (3) senior lecturer/reader; and (4) professor).<sup>3</sup> All the data were collected by the same person and then a random sample checked for accuracy by the other authors.

## Results

Of the 1,817 academics analysed, 30.8 per cent are female and 69.2 per cent are male. Although data were collected by a different method, this is comparable to the findings of the 2009 *PSA Survey of the Profession* in which women made up 30.3 per cent of the profession (Topf, 2009). Women made up 24 per cent of the profession in 2002, 19 per cent in 1997, 12 per cent in 1987 and 10 per cent in 1978 (Bennie and Topf, 2003, cited in Childs and Krook, 2006, p. 26). Thus, although women continue to comprise a minority of political scientists, a steady long-term increase in their numbers can be perceived.

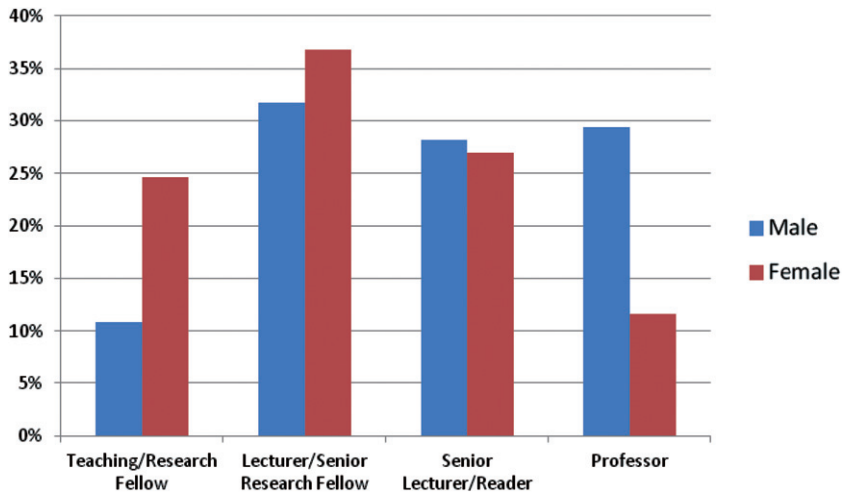
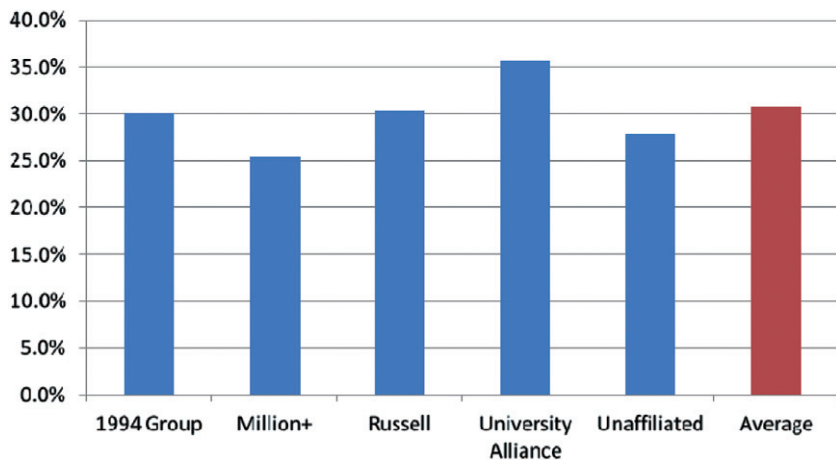
As can be seen from Table 1, while there are comparable numbers of male and female teaching/research fellows, men outnumbered women quite significantly in the other categories. Thus, as shown in Figure 1, while a quarter of female political scientists are teaching/research fellows, just over a tenth of male political scientists are employed on this basis. On the other hand, 29 per cent of male political scientists but only 12 per cent of their female counterparts are professors.

These data can then be used to produce an average 'seniority' rating for both male and female political scientists. This is produced by, first, giving a weighting to each category of job title (1 = teaching/research fellow; 2 = lecturer/senior research fellow; 3 = senior lecturer/reader; and 4 = professor). The sum of each weighting multiplied by the number of male or female political scientists in the corresponding category of job title is then divided by the total number of male or female political scientists to produce a rating for both female and male political scientists.

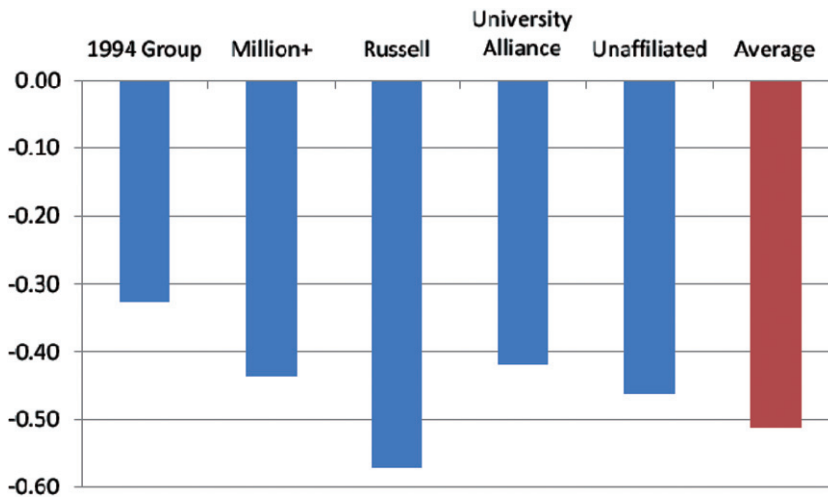
The average female political scientist in the UK has a seniority rating of 2.26, while the average male political scientist in the UK has a seniority rating of 2.76. This then suggests, on this rating mechanism, that the average female political scientist in the UK holds a position 0.5 lower than their average male counterpart does. Thus, not

**Table 1: Numbers of male and female political scientists by job title and in total as of July/August 2011 (% in brackets)**

	Teaching/ research fellow	Lecturer/senior research fellow	Senior lecturer/ reader	Professor	Total
Male	136 (50%)	398 (66%)	354 (70%)	369 (85%)	1257 (69%)
Female	138 (50%)	206 (34%)	151 (30%)	65 (15%)	560 (31%)
Total	274 (100%)	604 (100%)	505 (100%)	434 (100%)	1817 (100%)

**Figure 1: Job title by percentage of total male or female political scientists****Figure 2: Percentage of female political scientists by university membership group**

only are there fewer women in the profession but they tend to occupy lower positions within departments. Figures 2 and 3 show, respectively, the percentage of female political scientists and the 'seniority sex gap' by university membership groups.<sup>4</sup> As can be seen, the University Alliance is the only membership group that has a higher percentage of female political scientists than the average, while the Russell Group is the only membership group that has a worse seniority sex gap than the average.

**Figure 3: Seniority sex gap by university membership group**

*Note: Data for Million+ do not include Central Lancashire because no female political scientists were recorded at this institution and, therefore, no rating possible.*

These data on male and female political scientists can then be compared to the percentage of male and female students at different levels of university study between 1994 and 2009<sup>5</sup> (see Table 2 and Figure 4).

As Figure 4 shows, the trend lines for the proportion of female students at undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels have remained broadly level over this period. The trend line for female research postgraduate students shows both a relatively sharp increase in the proportion of female students at this level and that a leaking pipeline continues to exist, albeit one that is less leaky than previously, which means that women are less likely and/or able to continue with their studies as a postgraduate researcher (for explanations for why this may be the case, see Akhtar et al., 2005a and 2005b; Kantola, 2008). The trend line for the percentage of female political scientists is below that of female postgraduate research students but has increased at a faster rate over the period under consideration, which suggests that more women are entering the profession than previously. Indeed, if the percentage of female political scientists at the combined levels of teaching fellow, research fellow, lecturer and senior research fellow (39 per cent) is considered, then it appears that there is no longer any leakage between postgraduate research and entering the profession. However, as can be seen in Table 1, women comprise 50 per cent of teaching or research fellows and 34 per cent of lecturers and senior research fellows. This indicates that there may be some pooling of female political scientists in non-permanent positions and that men may continue to find it easier to secure a permanent position than women do.<sup>6</sup> The student data do not go back far enough to see whether the comparative lack of women in senior positions is due to a cohort effect, or to the continuing existence of significant

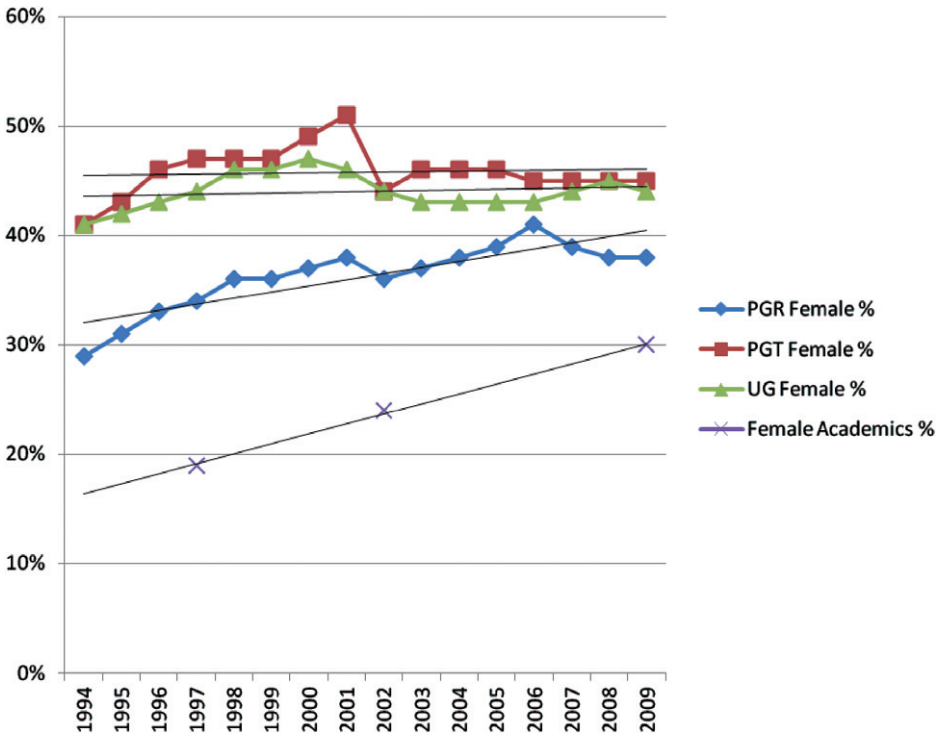
**Table 2: Percentage of female and male political science undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students, and female and male political scientists, 1994/95–2009/10**

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

Source: All data from Higher Education Statistics Agency (2011), except \*Bennie and Topf (2003) and <sup>†</sup>Topf (2009).

Note: The student population used to produce the percentages was based upon 1 December snapshots. A change in subject coding frame in 2002/2003 may mean that subject data prior to this are not directly comparable but remain useful for the purposes of this article.

**Figure 4: Percentage of female students and academics, 1994–2009 (with trend lines)**



barriers placed in front of women in terms of career progression. Other research undertaken in different countries does suggest that women continue both to be more likely to leave the profession than their male counterparts (APSA, 2005; Maliniak et al., 2008) and to find it more difficult than men to obtain the most senior positions (and attendant pay levels) within political science and/or international relations (Henehan and Sarkees, 2009, p. 435). In this vein, the sharp tail-off of women at the professorial level in the UK is perhaps indicative of something more than merely a cohort effect but requires further study to ascertain whether this is the case and, if so, what barriers continue to exist. What the data do show is that women make up a greater proportion of professors in Russell Group (16 per cent) and 1994 Group (20 per cent) universities – usually seen as the most prestigious institutions – than in universities affiliated with the Million+ Group (6 per cent) or Alliance Group (9 per cent). This indicates that, while women in general may find it more difficult to gain promotion than men do, there do not appear to be extra barriers in terms of women gaining professorships within those institutions with the purported best reputations (even though the Russell Group has the worst seniority sex gap score).

Turning to individual departments, Table 3 shows the ranking of departments by the percentage of political scientists who are female, while Table 4 shows the

**Table 3: Ranking of political science departments by percentage of female political scientists as of July/August 2011 (highest to lowest)**

Rank	University	% female	Female/total	Rank	University	% female	Female/total
1	Lincoln	60	9/15	–	St Andrews	30	9/30
–	Middlesex	60	3/5	–	West of Scotland	30	3/10
3	SOAS	53	18/34	43	Coventry	29	2/7
4	Oxford Brookes	50	9/18	–	Keele	29	8/28
–	Sheffield Hallam	50	3/6	–	Kingston	29	4/14
–	University College London	50	22/44	–	Liverpool Hope	29	2/7
7	Southampton	45	9/20	–	York	29	8/28
8	Goldsmiths	44	7/16	48	Sussex (IR)	28	7/25
–	Nottingham Trent	44	8/18	49	Aberdeen	27	6/22
10	De Montfort	43	3/7	–	Westminster	27	6/22
11	Open	39	9/23	51	Essex	26	10/38
12	Aston	38	5/13	52	Bath	25	3/12
–	Bristol	38	15/40	–	Loughborough	25	5/20
–	Edinburgh	38	10/26	–	Plymouth	25	4/16
–	Birkbeck	38	8/21	–	Reading	25	4/16
–	Queen Mary	38	11/29	56	King's College London	24	12/50
–	Northumbria	38	3/8	57	Durham	23	6/26
–	Strathclyde	38	10/26	–	Hull	23	5/22
–	Surrey	38	5/13	–	LSE (IR)	23	9/39
20	Nottingham	37	14/38	–	Warwick	23	11/48
–	Salford	37	7/19	61	Canterbury Christ Church	22	2/9
22	Bradford	35	9/26	–	East Anglia	22	5/23
–	Glasgow	35	8/23	–	Leeds Metropolitan	22	2/9
–	Leicester	35	6/17	–	Liverpool	22	2/9
–	Manchester	35	17/48	–	Swansea	22	4/18
26	Aberystwyth	33	14/43	66	LSE (Government)	21	11/53
–	Cambridge	33	15/45	67	Portsmouth	20	2/10
–	Greenwich	33	2/6	–	Sheffield	20	6/30
–	Kent	33	9/27	69	Sussex (Politics & Cont. Euro. Studies)	19	3/16
–	Lancaster	33	5/15	70	Brunel	18	4/22
–	Staffordshire	33	1/3	71	London South Bank	17	1/6
–	Ulster	33	3/9	–	West of England	17	2/12
33	Birmingham	32	12/37	73	Huddersfield	14	1/7
–	Royal Holloway	32	6/19	–	London Metropolitan	14	3/22
–	Oxford	32	32/99	75	Dundee	13	1/8
36	Exeter	31	15/49	–	Stirling	13	1/8
–	Manchester Metropolitan	31	8/26	77	Wolverhampton	11	1/9
–	Queens University Belfast	31	11/35	78	Cardiff	6	1/17
39	Leeds	30	13/44	79	Central Lancashire	0	0/6
–	Newcastle	30	10/33				



**Table 4: Ranking of political science departments by seniority sex gap (SSG) as of July/August 2011**

Rank	University	SSG	Rank	University	SSG
1	Middlesex	1.33333	41	LSE (IR)	-0.4444
2	Reading	0.41667	42	Bradford	-0.4576
3	Birkbeck	0.41346	43	Hull	-0.4588
4	Liverpool Hope	0.3	44	St Andrews	-0.4921
5	Stirling	0.28571	45	Liverpool	-0.5
6	West of England	0.2	-	Staffordshire	-0.5
7	Sussex (IR)	0.18254	47	University College London	-0.5455
8	Manchester Metropolitan	0.13889	48	Kingston	-0.55
9	Portsmouth	0.125	49	Nottingham	-0.5536
10	Manchester	0.09867	50	Exeter	-0.5588
11	Durham	0.01667	51	Goldsmiths	-0.5714
12	Loughborough	0	52	Queen Mary	-0.5808
-	Northumbria	0	53	SOAS	-0.6042
-	Sheffield Hallam	0	54	Warwick	-0.629
15	Edinburgh	-0.05	55	Leeds Metropolitan	-0.6429
-	York	-0.05	56	Oxford	-0.666
17	Essex	-0.1071	57	De Montfort	-0.6667
18	Kent	-0.1667	-	Salford	-0.6667
19	East Anglia	-0.1889	59	Aberystwyth	-0.6823
20	Coventry	-0.2	60	King's College London	-0.6886
-	Lancaster	-0.2	61	Dundee	-0.7143
22	Westminster	-0.2083	62	Strathclyde	-0.75
23	Leeds	-0.2283	63	Oxford Brookes	-0.7778
24	Bristol	-0.24	64	Aberdeen	-0.8125
25	Greenwich	-0.25	65	Cambridge	-0.8333
-	Nottingham Trent	-0.25	66	Newcastle	-0.9
27	West of Scotland	-0.2857	67	Sheffield	-0.9167
28	Swansea	-0.3214	68	London Metropolitan	-0.9474
29	Huddersfield	-0.3333	69	Keele	-0.975
-	Lincoln	-0.3333	70	London South Bank	-1
-	Ulster	-0.3333	71	Open	-1.1587
32	Canterbury Christ Church	-0.3571	72	Cardiff	-1.3125
33	Glasgow	-0.3667	73	Sussex (Politics & Cont. Euro. Studies)	-1.3846
34	Queens University Belfast	-0.3712	74	Aston	-1.4
35	Birmingham	-0.39	75	Plymouth	-1.4167
36	Leicester	-0.3939	76	Southampton	-1.4444
37	Surrey	-0.4	77	Bath	-1.5556
38	Brunel	-0.4167	78	Wolverhampton	-1.75
39	Royal Holloway	-0.4359	79	Central Lancashire*	-
40	LSE (Government)	-0.4416			

*Note: A positive score indicates that the average female political scientist is more senior than the average male political scientist is in that department. A score of zero indicates that the average female political scientist and the average male political scientist are of equal seniority in that department. A negative score indicates that the average female political scientist is less senior than the average male political scientist is in that department.*

*\*Central Lancashire could not receive a score, as there were no female political scientists in that department listed on their website.*

ranking of departments by the size of the seniority sex gap. Table 5 shows an overall ranking of female presence in political science departments based on the percentage of female members of a department and the seniority sex gap. This overall ranking was produced by finding the average of the two rankings for the percentage of female political scientists within the department and the seniority sex gap.

As can be seen, Middlesex tops this particular ranking of female presence, although it must be noted that this academic unit contains a very small number of political scientists overall. It was the only department both in which there were more female than male political scientists and in which the average female political scientist was more senior than the average male political scientist. Although again an academic unit which contains a very small number of political scientists overall, Sheffield Hallam can perhaps be regarded as the optimal department in terms of balance because it was the only one in which there were equal numbers of male and female political scientists and the average seniority rating was the same for male and female academics. Central Lancashire is ranked last because it was the only department with no female political scientists listed on its website (although female academics are present within a larger unit covering multiple subject areas of which political science is a part).

The term 'female presence' is preferred over the more qualitative descriptor of 'women-friendliness'. Other factors beyond quantity and seniority, such as child-care considerations, ethos, atmosphere, pay, working practices and management style, are of course important in considering the 'women-friendliness' of any given department (although some suggest that a 'chilly climate' exists within departments in which less than 15 per cent of staff are women (Henehan and Sarkees, 2009, p. 436)). As such, this ranking should not be viewed necessarily as a naming-and-shaming league table, nor as an indicator of 'women-friendliness' for any given department. It certainly should not be treated as a definitive list, given the 'snapshot' gathering of data from websites not necessarily up to date and the continual turnover of staff within departments. Instead, the ranking can hopefully be used to stimulate debate within departments and the discipline as a whole. Furthermore, it can perhaps also be viewed as a springboard for further research which extends work on barriers to entry into the profession (see also Akhtar et al., 2005a and 2005b; Kantola, 2008), which investigates the 'women-friendliness' of the discipline (both in terms of whether the numerical and seniority (im)balance between male and female political scientists is 'felt' by those working within particular departments and in terms of whether and to what extent direct/indirect discrimination occurs within departments and the discipline as a whole), and which seeks to explain the current situation regarding the number and seniority of female political scientists working in the UK.

## Conclusion

In terms of sex, the composition of the academic discipline of political science in the UK is not too far removed from the practice it often analyses: 30.8 per cent of political scientists are female compared to 26.2 per cent of politicians (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011). If the current rate of progress is maintained, it will not be until the late 2030s that the percentage of female academics in political

**Table 5: Ranking of political science departments in terms of female presence as of July/August 2011**

Rank	University	Rank	University
1	Middlesex	41	Strathclyde
2	Birkbeck	42	Portsmouth
3	Sheffield Hallam	43	Salford
4	Northumbria	–	West of England
5	Edinburgh	45	East Anglia
6	Lincoln	–	Stirling
7	Manchester	47	Open
8	Nottingham Trent	48	Southampton
9	Bristol	–	St Andrews
10	Kent	50	Aberystwyth
–	Manchester Metropolitan	51	Aston
12	Lancaster	–	Exeter
13	Liverpool Hope	53	Oxford
14	Surrey	–	Swansea
15	Greenwich	55	Cambridge
–	University College London	–	Kingston
17	Reading	57	Canterbury Christ Church
18	Glasgow	58	LSE (IR)
–	Sussex (IR)	59	Hull
–	Ulster	60	Huddersfield
21	SOAS	61	Newcastle
22	Leicester	62	Liverpool
–	York	–	LSE (Government)
24	Goldsmiths	64	Brunel
25	Leeds	65	Warwick
26	Coventry	66	Keele
27	Bradford	67	Aberdeen
–	Queen Mary	68	Leeds Metropolitan
–	Loughborough	–	King's College London
30	West of Scotland	70	Plymouth
31	De Montfort	71	Bath
–	Oxford Brookes	72	Sheffield
33	Birmingham	73	Dundee
–	Durham	74	London Metropolitan
–	Essex	–	London South Bank
36	Nottingham	76	Sussex (Politics & Cont. Euro. Studies)
37	Queens University Belfast	77	Cardiff
38	Staffordshire	78	Wolverhampton
–	Westminster	79	Central Lancashire
40	Royal Holloway		

science is comparable to the percentage of female undergraduate students. There thus appear to be issues surrounding the 'politics of presence' not only within the UK's formal governmental sphere, but also within UK political science. The profession is not a bastion of (numerical) equality and the data indicate that significant barriers may continue to persist within our immediate setting. This is perhaps not surprising to a profession which is, on the whole, aware that gendered inequalities exist in terms of pay and prestige differentials, occupational segregation and attempts to combine caring duties with employment. However, it is perhaps curious that a profession that is often concerned by these inequalities has not accorded more attention to its own backyard. Furthermore, the data raise questions about the discipline, particularly when set in the broader context of concerns about both increased casualisation within academia and the initial proposals surrounding the Research Excellence Framework and maternity leave.<sup>7</sup> By shining a light on the current situation in terms of both the discipline as a whole and individual departments, the aims of this article are to prompt heightened internal debate on the politics of presence within the discipline and to go some way to increase the current rate of progress towards a more equal presence of male and female political scientists at all levels of the discipline.

## Author contact details

**Stephen Bates**, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. E-mail: [s.r.bates@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.r.bates@bham.ac.uk)

**Laura Jenkins**, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. E-mail: [l.m.jenkins@bham.ac.uk](mailto:l.m.jenkins@bham.ac.uk)

**Zoe Pflaeger**, Department of International Relations, University of Sussex, Sussex House, Brighton BN1 9RH, UK. E-mail: [z.pflaeger@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:z.pflaeger@sussex.ac.uk)

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## Notes

- 1 Due to only one or a complete lack of political scientists working in departments, or a lack of information provided by the website, departments at Glasgow Caledonian, Brighton Centrim, Glamorgan, the Institute for Study of Americas, the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, Northampton and Robert Gordon were not included in the data.
- 2 LSE and Sussex each had two departments counted separately in the analysis.
- 3 Ideally, whether the employee was part-time or full-time would also have been coded but this was not possible to do from the information provided on the websites.
- 4 Durham, Exeter, York and Queen Mary are included within the 1994 Group, as they were still members when the data were collected.
- 5 These data were sourced from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2011). Data from before this period were not possible to obtain.
- 6 This mirrors a trend found in the US (APSA, 2005, p. 8; Brintnall, cited in Tolleson-Rinehart and Carroll, 2006, p. 511).
- 7 See <http://www.genderandeducation.com/issues/early-career-female-researchers-beware-message-from-the-political-studies-women-and-politics-group/>. These proposals have now been dropped after pressure from many quarters of academia. However, the issue is not that they were dropped but that they were proposed in the first place.

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