editorial

In his article of welcome, when the journal was founded four years ago, Jean Blondel (2001) made a number of pleas about the direction in which the European political science profession should go, and argued that *EPS* could significantly help in facilitating this process. The articles carried in this issue respond to all three of Blondel's concerns.

One was 'visibility': the need and the capacity to reach out beyond the academy to say with authority 'what the knowledge we have collectively amassed tells us about what is possible, likely, impossible or plainly wrong' (2001: 4). Gianfranco Pasquino, as a leading figure in the profession, has always taken this dictum seriously and we are delighted to publish his piece in this issue on what life as an Italian MP taught him about political science, and how his work as a political scientist influenced his role as a politician. Although Blondel may be correct that the authority of our voice outside the academy is slighter than that of other social scientists, Pasquino's experience is an example of how political scientists do participate in the intellectual and political life of society. They do so in a range of other capacities as well – as survey researchers and pollsters, contributors to the print and broadcast media, advisors to public bodies of all kinds, the gatekeepers of research funding bodies, and so on. We encourage other colleagues to follow Pasquino's example and offer their own reflections on such experiences for publication in *EPS*.

As Blondel implies, problems of professional 'visibility' cannot be divorced from problems of 'substance' and of 'structure'. Regarding the former, we agree that country parochialism constitutes a significant barrier to greater visibility. And in this we are not helped by national funding councils, some of which, at least, are reluctant to finance research that cannot easily demonstrate its immediate-term significance to nationally defined 'end users'. In such circumstances, we are often obliged to forge ahead unaided – from which point of view the account, by Marc Hooghe, of the growing cooperation between the Dutch and Flemish political-science communities, makes interesting reading. As he implies, the overcoming of country parochialism need not, and should not entail an acceptance of uniformity, but on the contrary should take place 'in a multilateral manner' which leaves open the possibility of research 'into a wider range of topics… from a wider range of perspectives'.

Much the same can be said of the structure-visibility nexus. Although it is difficult to envisage improving visibility without overcoming country-specificity in arrangements for teaching postgraduate and undergraduate students, moves towards greater standardisation of curricula should not be allowed to stifle innovation – a theme also touched on in this issue. Although it is doubtful that the quality of supervision provided to postgraduate students can be much enhanced by attempts to regulate the teacher-student relationship – as Tonge points out, learning agreements 'might be disregarded by either party during the course of a research project' – as Umland points out, in the former Soviet Union, overworked and underpaid university teachers who treat

(127–128) © 2005 European Consortium for Political Research. 1680-4333/05 $30 www.palgrave-journals.com/eps
https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210029 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their obligations as a formality not surprisingly find that their students behave accordingly. The concern must surely therefore be with enhancing the quality of teaching and learning by enhancing levels of *commitment* to students, and regulation and monitoring can only partly contribute to that end. Increasing commitment in practice rather involves a willingness, when it comes to curricula, to experiment and innovate.

From this point of view, the staunch resistance in some parts of the profession to the skills agenda is profoundly depressing. There is no point complaining about 'dumbing down' and the expanding numbers of undergraduates with less developed academic and transferable skills unless academics embrace innovation in communicating skills. There is something rather distasteful about academics, most of whom have secure jobs, being unwilling to engage in personal development planning and other innovative approaches to teaching to enhance the intellectual and labour-market potential of their students. In this light, the growing autonomy of universities in at least some contexts (such as the Italian, as Capano and Tronconi explain) is very much to be welcomed for the enhanced scope for skills and other curriculum innovations that comes with it.

Finally, as Blondel's article implied, none of these problems and opportunities can be effectively dealt with in the absence of progress towards an integrated profession. Promoting the awareness of this need for a European academic *community* is at the core of this journal's mission. In this issue, we seek to contribute to that goal through John Groom's reflections on the state of International Relations in France and our symposium on the significance of European integration and the validity of parallels between the EU and the US. Analysis and reflection on what is distinctive about Europe contributes to developing a European identity in political science that, in turn, will equip this profession to play the part 'that is required by the importance of the subject to which it is devoted' (Blondel, 2001: 9).

Jim Newell and *Martin Rhodes*

References

Blondel, J. (2001) 'Greetings for the New Journal', *European Political Science* 1(1): 3–9.

doi:10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210029

https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210029 Published online by Cambridge University Press