

BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
Executive Committee meeting

Friday 7 November 2008, 12pm
Seminar Room, 19 Gordon Square, London WC1E 6BT

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present: Brad Hooker, Helen Beebee, Mark Addis, Maria Alvarez, Jo Wolff, Gordon Finlayson, Tom Sorell, M.M. McCabe, James Holden

1. Apologies:

Michael Brady, Jeremy Butterfield, Alessandra Tanesini, Adrian Moore, Pauline Phemister

2. Minutes of the last meeting: Approved

3. Matters arising

Item 3, liaison with BPPA: The BPA/BPPA employability workshop had gone ahead at Birmingham in May, with input from Adrian, Brad, Gordon, Alessandra, Helen and Mark. HB reported that while its attendance could have been higher (there were around 25 PhD students), it was very well-received.

Item 3, liability insurance: HB reported that she had been quoted around £150 for employer's liability insurance and roughly the same again for trustee liability insurance. It was agreed that HB should go ahead and arrange cover.

ACTION: HB

Item 6, Arts & Humanities Rapid Response Group: HB reminded that 'AHRRG' had been renamed the 'Arts and Humanities User Group' (A-HUG); its first act had been to send a letter, endorsed by 18 learned societies, to the AHRC concerning the ERIH (see below).

Item 8, recent AHRC changes and cuts (i): HB reminded the Committee that she had sent the AHRC a BPA proposal for a successor scheme to the RLS; JW reported that early indications suggested that the AHRC would be adopting a scheme that incorporated at least some of the elements of this proposal. There was then a general discussion about the BPA's relationship with the AHRC. TS noted that the AHRC is itself in a not altogether secure position, being by far the smallest (and newest) member of RCUK, and pointed out that continued antagonism between the AHRC and learned societies and subject associations was not helping the AHRC to gain the kind of prestige and corresponding levels of funding that the philosophical community would like it to have. JW pointed out that with Hefce and the AHRC now both falling within DIUS, there was a danger that the dual support system of research funding would be considered unnecessary, and the importance of its continuation was certainly something that the BPA and the AHRC could agree on.

It was agreed that HB would contact the AHRC to find out when to expect the results of their deliberations concerning the RLS. Assuming the AHRC's proposals were acceptable, BH could use the opportunity to publicly endorse the proposals and reiterate the importance and value of the AHRC.

The Committee also considered the AHRC's continued focus on collaborative research funding. It was agreed that it was pointless – and counter-productive – to continue to criticize the AHRC for this. A more fruitful strategy would be to help get the message across to philosophers that 'collaborative' research projects need not involve jointly-authored work, and indeed can largely be made to fit the mode of research under which most of us operate in any case: organizing, attending and presenting work at conferences and workshops, discussions and reading of drafts amongst researchers in the same field, supervision of PhD students and employment of postdocs, and single-authored outputs. It was agreed that HB would draft something for the next newsletter along these lines.

ACTION: HB, BH

Item 10, Philosophy at Aberdeen: BH had written to the VC at Aberdeen but received no reply. The Department seemed to be reviving, however, with at least one new appointment made and the possibility of others to follow.

4. Director's report

[a] Welcome to new members

Jeremy Butterfield and Michael Brady had joined the Committee; Gordon was now an elected rather than co-opted member; and Adrian had been re-elected. The Committee welcomed the new Executive Secretary, James Holden.

(b) Philosophy at Ulster

HB reminded the Committee that she had been alerted to the closure of the Philosophy degree programme at the University of Ulster, after a review of the Department had recommended the revitalization of the Department and an appointment had been advertised; this appointment was then withdrawn. She had recently written to the VC of the University of Ulster, and awaited a reply.

(c) FISP

The Committee had been requested to reconsider its decision not to renew its membership of FISP. It had now done this, rejoined, and found a representative to attend the FISP meeting at the World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul. It had been reported that US philosophers were likely to be more involved with FISP in the future; in the light of this, it was agreed that BH would write to the APA suggesting co-operation between the APA and the BPA, especially in connection with FISP.

ACTION: BH

4. Treasurer's report

Mark A suggested that while this should be a standing item on the agenda, there was no need for a full report to each meeting (as well as at the AGM) unless significant issues to be discussed. This was agreed. JH had produced a brief report showing the number of so-far-renewed and new members (currently 206 individual members, 27 departmental members and 11 learned society members) and the bank balance was just under £18k.

5. Philosophy in schools

(a) Website

As part of the strategy of finding ways for the BPA to help enhance the teaching of philosophy in schools, TS had been investigating the possibility of developing a website explicitly aimed at schoolteachers. He had approached Edexcel and OCR about whether they would be willing to recommend the website to schoolteachers and had had encouraging responses. He had also been discussing with the PRS Subject Centre the possibility of their hosting the site, again with an encouraging response. The plan was for the website to have (in temporal order):

(i) a 'helpdesk' facility for schoolteachers, using the BPA's existing 'regional advisers' and perhaps others, including carefully selected graduate students, to provide responses. (TS said Edexcel's existing software could be used for this.)

(ii) a gateway to approved sources (perhaps similar to, but more discerning than, the Intute gateway).

(iii) downloadable teaching materials, e.g. podcasts, closely related to the AS and A level syllabi and easily incorporated into lesson plans. These could in principle be commissioned by the BPA from suitable philosophers.

The Committee agreed to this basic plan; the next step was for TS to finalise arrangements for hosting, URL etc. and to get a quote from a web designer to begin work on constructing the site.

ACTION: TS

(b) Humanities Diploma

TS reported that he had been in discussion with the people trying to put together a Humanities Diploma, planned to be run alongside A levels. This was at a very early stage of discussion, which gave the BPA an opportunity to be involved at the outset in any philosophy element rather than having to lobby for change to an existing curriculum; however plans were not yet sufficiently advanced for any input of this kind. TS to monitor the situation.

(c) PGCE in Philosophy

TS noted that the PGCE in Philosophy had been abolished by the Thatcher government in the 1980's, and that reintroducing it is something the NCP had raised with the DoE with no success. However there were now, with large and increasing numbers of 6th-formers studying philosophy at AS and A level, very good reasons for reintroducing it, and TS pointed out that this was an excellent opportunity for the BPA to make a real and lasting difference to philosophy in the UK. Everyone agreed with this. It was agreed that BH would write to the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

ACTION: BH

6. Membership and recruitment

Mark reported on the membership situation. On the positive side, there were now 184 individual members paying by standing order, which means that renewal rates in the future will be high. However, the total number of members is still low – and has not increased (though this may partly be due to renewal inertia, since renewal reminders were only recently sent). Learned society renewals have also been very low. HB noted that her experience at the Joint Session was that many people actively wanted to join, or at least were happy to, but would not do so unless physically placed in front of a membership form and a pen thrust in their hand. Hence thinking of ways of making it easier for people to join is probably a more effective strategy than advertising our existence and virtues, the latter now being relatively well-known.

The following were agreed:

(a) Website: HB to investigate setting up a web form for individual membership (standing orders would still need to be set up, but those with online banking facilities can do this without having to lick any stamps). HB also to make it clear on the website that membership forms can be emailed and to point out that SO's can be done online with one's bank, and to change the learned society information and membership forms to include paying by SO as an option.

ACTION: HB

(b) BPA-sponsored receptions: After a discussion about various other options (BPA one-day conferences, etc.) it was decided that HB would discuss with Barry Smith the possibility of the Institute of Philosophy helping to advertise the BPA, and in particular the BPA hosting a wine reception after an IP event as a means of recruiting new members.

ACTION: HB

(c) Recruitment materials: Several Committee members said they would be happy to distribute recruitment materials at PG and research events they or their departments were organising. HB to think about existing recruitment and membership materials and how best to ensure that these are available to Committee members.

ACTION: HB

(d) Targeting non-members: It was agreed that a direct approach from a Committee member was likely to be the most effective way of recruiting. It was therefore agreed that: (i) HB would circulate the current list of UK philosophers to the Committee for another round of amendments and updates; (ii) JH would then highlight the non-members on this list; (iii) Committee members would then divide at least the larger (and their own) departments amongst themselves and email people individually.

Some Committee members also agreed to contact members of staff at various new universities direct.

ACTION: HB, JH, ALL

(e) Website links: Member departments to be asked to add a link from their site to the BPA.

ACTION: HB

(f) Postgraduates: HB had asked various PG directors to forward a letter to PGR students inviting them to join, but it was unclear how much response this had had. HB to contact the BPPA to discuss ways of advertising the BPA to their members.

ACTION: HB

7. Use of BPA membership list/emails

JH had been approached by a publisher, asking whether the BPA would be prepared to 'rent' its membership list to them. The Committee agreed as a matter of policy that the membership list and contact details would not be passed on to any other organisation.

8. European Reference Index for the Humanities

HB noted the following developments:

(a) Over 50 history and philosophy of science journals had published a jointly-signed editorial condemning the ERIH lists, and had asked for their own journals to be removed from the lists.

(b) The ARC in Australia had produced for consultation a similar ranking, with the explicit intention of using it for the allocation of research funding. Aside from some articles in *The Australian* (mostly from philosophers), there had been little critical response. HB had written to the Secretary of the AJP explaining the reaction of subject associations in the UK and offering support for any critical response they might want to make; this offer was politely declined, at least for the moment.

(c) Possibly as a response to the BPA letter, the ESF website said that the ESF 'advised against' the use of the ERIH lists to assess individuals rather than merely 'not recommending' it.

(e) A-HUG had written to Philip Esler (see 'Matters arising' above) and received a somewhat dismissive reply.

(f) Criticism of the ERIH seemed to be gathering pace outside the UK. Someone was co-ordinating a German/Austrian critical response, and the French journal *Semen* had launched an online petition against a list, based on the ERIH lists, produced by l'Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur in France.

There was a discussion about whether, and if so how, the BPA should continue to pursue the issue of the ERIH. It was agreed that further engagement with the AHRC was unlikely to be productive; the AHRC were very well aware of the BPA's and other subject associations' views already. HB would convey this to the organiser of A-HUG.

However, it was agreed that it was reasonable to draw the attention of UK philosophy journal editors to the response of the history and philosophy of science journals. GF agreed to contact various journal editors, attaching the HPS journals' editorial.

ACTION: GF

9. Representation of women on the BPA exec

HB reported that she had an email from a member during this year's elections, noting that there were no women standing for election to the Committee and wondering whether a quota for women on the Committee should be established.

It was agreed that there was not, at the moment, any problem that needed to be addressed, given that 5 of the 13 Committee members are women (so if anything they are over-represented). It was agreed, however, that it was important that, as far as possible, the make-up of the Committee should be as representative of the UK philosophical community as possible,

and that there could at some point in the future be a need to encourage women to stand for election.

10. Women in philosophy

HB noted that the proportion of women in the profession did not appear to have improved much (if at all) over the last few years. There was some – very inconclusive – discussion about why this might be. It was agreed that it would be sensible to gather some statistics concerning the proportion of women at various career stages from UG upwards; and that HB and AT (who is on the SWIP Committee) should consult discuss the issue.

ACTION: HB, AT

11. BPA teaching award

A member had suggested that the BPA might institute a 'teaching award', along similar lines to the PSA's Bernard Crick Award. JW pointed out that it was near-impossible to strike a balance between keeping the workload involved in judging a competition to a minimum, and making a judgement that stood some chance of being reasonable. It was also unclear that giving awards was really part of the BPA's brief.

After some discussion, it was agreed that this should not be pursued further; however, TS, as the BPA representative on the Advisory Board of the PRS Subject Centre, would pass the suggestion on to them.

ACTION: TS

12. AHRC BGP award co-ordination

A member had asked that the BPA consider coordinating selection timetables amongst philosophy departments involved in the AHRC Block Grant Partnership competition for PG studentships.

JW clarified the timetable for this year, as he understood it. Universities would be given a provisional decision concerning number, levels and departmental breakdown of studentships in early January, with an assurance that final numbers would not differ too significantly from this. Universities could then begin to advertise their studentships, while being given 3 weeks 'right to reply' to the AHRC's report on their applications. The AHRC's own deadline for submission of studentship applications (which in effect it would rubber-stamp) would be fairly similar to its previous deadline (i.e. April/May).

Various potential problems with the system were identified. In particular it was unclear how much variation in application deadlines there would be between universities, and it was also unclear what would happen if a student who had accepted an award later withdrew. It was agreed that it was impossible to attempt any coordination, or even to decide whether coordination would be a good idea, with so little information available about procedures and timetables, but that the issue would be taken up again by email once the AHRC had released more details.

13. Philosophy in New Universities: Questionnaire (Mark)

Mark A presented interim results of the questionnaire that had been sent out to philosophers in new universities. It was hard to draw firm conclusions about general trends at this stage, though declining UG numbers and inadequate library provision appeared to be causes for concern. Those who had volunteered to approach philosophers in new universities in connection with joining the BPA agreed to also encourage the relevant departments to fill in the questionnaire. The issue would be revisited when more completed questionnaires had been received.

ACTION: ALL

14. AQA Advisory Committee membership

JW reported that he would be resigning from the AQA Advisory Committee and that the AQA were happy to invite a nominee from the BPA to replace him. Mark A volunteered; JW agreed to pass this on to the AQA.

ACTION: JW

15. AOB

BH reported that a member had suggested the issue of the format/content of UK philosophy PhDs be addressed by the BPA. It was noted that Princeton and MIT did not require philosophy PhDs to consist of a single, sustained piece of work, but could instead consist of portfolio of publishable articles. There was some discussion of the merits of this kind of PhD. Some people said that this issue had been discussed within their departments and that there was some enthusiasm for it, though not everyone agreed that the portfolio model was a good one. It was generally agreed that only the bigger, more powerful philosophy departments would be in a position to lobby for this model with their universities; other departments would regard it as too risky. It was agreed to discuss this again at the next meeting.