

BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
Executive Committee meeting

Thursday 22 April 2010
Senate House, Malet St, London

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present: Maria Alvarez, Helen Beebee, Michael Brady, Adrian Moore, M. M. McCabe, Jeremy Butterfield, Alessandra Tanesini, David Bain, Chris Hookway

1. Apologies: Mark Addis, Tom Sorell, Gillian Howie, Gordon Finlayson

2. Minutes of the last meeting: Approved

3. Matters arising

Item 3/3, BPA teaching award: Mark A raised this with the PRS, but they decided that it would be too expensive in terms of staff time to operate.

Item 3/6(iii) Representation of temporary staff: Dawn Philips has agreed to come and speak to the Executive Committee about issues surrounding the appointment and treatment of temporary staff (see item 4 below).

Item 3/7, Recruitment & membership: Advertisement of free membership of the IP for all full BPA members is now on the IP website and a system for managing this has been sorted out.

Item 3/7, Postgraduates: BPPA members are now entitled to free associate membership of the BPA; this offer is now advertised on the BPPA website.

Item 3/8, Philosophy in schools: HB hasn't yet approached Barry Smith with a view to discussing a possible role for the IP in the Answers website.

ACTION: HB

Item 3/11: Philosophy in new universities: See item 10 below.

Item 3/12, AHRC 'Future Directions' consultation: It doesn't appear to be possible to get information from the AHRC yet on successful philosophy grant applications since the introduction of impact statements. HB to get the relevant information once it becomes available.

ACTION: HB

Item 6, Women in Philosophy: The WiP sub-committee has now been set up (members: HB, MM, CH, AT, AM, Maria A, GH, Jenny Saul (Director of SWIP) and Alexander Bird) and will meet later in the day. HB will circulate the draft minutes of this to the Exec.

Item 7, PRS Subject Centre: Mark A is now the BPA rep on the Advisory Board; see also item 6 below.

Item 8, BIS review of UK postgraduate provision: The BPA didn't make a submission to this review. However the review report has now been published; HB to draft a letter to BIS expressing the BPA's view of the report. (Possible issues: career management for MA students; student loans for postgraduates; the role of employers; impact; interdisciplinarity; the assumption that 'skills' and 'content' are two separate things. It was noted that the healthy state of postgraduate provision in the UK – stressed in the report – is a good reason for BIS not to attempt to make any radical changes.

ACTION: HB

Item 9, Results of impact meeting: HB drew up a BPA 'position statement' on impact, and all participants had been given the opportunity to provide input into this. The statement formed the basis of the BPA's impact-related answers in the REF consultation.

Item 10, REF consultation response: Done. HEFCE have now issued a report based on the responses; see item 8 below.

Item 11, AOB (staff on temporary contracts): HB has arranged a meeting with an employment lawyer specializing in HE; to report back at the next meeting.

ACTION: HB

4. Report on temporary contract staff

Dawn Philips gave a presentation on the unsatisfactory position, nationally, of temporary contract staff (whether hourly-paid or in temporary teaching or research positions). She reported that such staff often do not have access to a range of benefits available to early-career staff on permanent contracts, such as mentoring, teaching reductions and sabbatical entitlements; and also that such staff (especially those on teaching fellowships) and are often expected to take on large administrative roles, teach outside their areas of specialism across a wide range of subjects. She presented a range of proposals, including the 'consolidation' of several short-term, ad hoc positions covering research and maternity leave, grant-funded teaching buy-outs, etc., within an individual department into a single, more substantial and longer contract.

There was some discussion of these issues. The general view was that there is certainly a problem here to be addressed, but that some of the more radical proposals may be impossible to implement. However, the BPA should investigate the issues, and it was generally felt that the BPA could have some influence on departments here. It was also noted that the recent legislation aimed at improving the situation of short-term contract staff had in general made the situation worse, e.g. by encouraging 'gappy' contracts, and teaching fellowships rather than temporary lectureships.

It was agreed that a working group would be set up to investigate; HB to call for volunteers for membership and to invite DP to join this group. DP to circulate a summary of her report and proposals to the Executive Committee.

ACTION: HB, DP

5. Director's report

(a) AHRC/A-HUG: Robin Osborne, of the Arts and Humanities User Group, set up a meeting with Rick Rylance, new Chief Executive of the AHRC. This took place in March and the BPA was represented by MM. Notes of the meeting are available on the BPA website. The main points were: (i) The AHRC has now withdrawn all involvement from the European Reference Index for the Humanities project, and is not involved in its successor (the creation of a bibliometric database). (ii) Impact: Rick Rylance urged the A&H community to engage with the impact agenda, since there is every reason to think that none of the main political parties would back off from it.

(b) AGM/Newsletter: It was agreed not to have an Exec meeting at the Joint Session in July, since not very many Exec members would be there. It was also agreed to have the AGM during a lunch-hour (as has happened for the last two years) rather than organizing a session on the Monday morning (as had previously happened), since these sessions tended to be poorly attended. HB to liaise with the JS organizers and to construct a newsletter for inclusion in JS conference packs.

ACTION: HB

(c) KCL cuts: MM reported that the situation was currently unclear, but that it appeared that it would not be as bad as at first feared; MM to wait until the final outcome was known and then report back to the subject community via the BPA.

ACTION: MM

6. Subject Centre update

Clare Saunders had prepared a briefing document for the meeting. It was noted that:

(a) Mark A had replaced TS on the PRS Advisory Board, and that his collaboration with the PRS was working well; the PRS's upcoming 'Beyond Boundaries' conference will be held at BCU.

(b) The PRS is organizing a seminar series on impact and co-organising with AUDTRS a conference on impact in TRS. The Committee welcomed these moves and it was agreed that liaison with the PRS on involvement in HEFCE decision-making on the assessment of impact may be beneficial; Mark A to discuss with the PRS.

ACTION: Mark A

(c) It had been reported in the press that the HEA was currently being reviewed and the future of the Subject Centres was unclear. Mark A to let the PRS know that the BPA would be happy to show its support if its future activities become threatened.

ACTION: Mark A

(d) The PRS is organizing two events for 'aspiring academics'. Mark A to discuss with the PRS whether there is scope for collaboration on the issue of temporary contract staff.

ACTION: Mark A

7. Committee members and officers 2010-11

MM reported that Maria A, Mark A and MM were coming to the end of their term, and MM could not be re-elected because she had now served the maximum number of elected terms. HB confirmed that MM would become a supernumerary member of the Committee until she had finished her term as President.

Maria A said she was happy to stand for re-election; HB to check same with Mark A. So there would be one (or possibly two) posts up for re-election. (There should normally be four per year but Pauline had resigned a year early, so 5 positions were filled in 2009 instead of 4.)

HB comes to the end of her term as Director (and supernumerary member of the Committee) but said she is willing to stay in post for a further year.

8. REF update

(a) HEFCE's decisions in the light of the REF consultation and its summary of responses were noted. HB reported that no response had been received to the BPA/AUDTRS letter expressing concerns with the proposed merger of the Philosophy and Theology & Religious Studies panels. The HEFCE summary of responses explicitly noted the opposition to the merger amongst several philosophy learned societies, but it seems likely that the merger will remain in place and at best some of the elements of the joint PT&RS results will be disaggregated. It was noted that an additional problem with the merged panel is that universities that are restructuring may take the merger as a sufficient reason to locate Philosophy and Theology/Religious Studies within the same School.

(b) HB reported that HEFCE have started to think about the assessment of impact, and had asked her for (i) nominations to attend a workshop on this and also (ii) examples of possible philosophy case studies. HB reported that she and MM had (i) suggested a couple of people and (ii) agreed that they would not seek case studies. This was decided on the grounds that there is a danger of making it seem as though good case studies are easy for philosophy departments to come up with, whereas the reality is likely to be that many departments will struggle. The Committee agreed that it was important in future dealings with HEFCE on impact to engage with them on the issue while being careful to avoid providing information that could be interpreted in a misleadingly optimistic way.

(c) It was agreed that while there were avenues still to explore with HEFCE, we should wait until after the election, when policies, time-frame etc. become clearer.

9. Philosophy in schools update

(a) HB reported that the 'Answers' site for school teachers was now up and running and seemed to be getting used a fair amount. The cost of running the site to be monitored and reviewed before the next Committee meeting.

ACTION: Mark A, HB

(b) The Committee noted Ed Balls' enthusiastic response to the idea of more trained philosophers teaching in secondary schools, although it was disappointed that (contrary to the impression given at the meeting with MM and TS) there was no suggestion that a philosophy might be included as a core qualification for a secondary PGCE course.

It was agreed to implement TS's proposals for next steps; in particular (a) to advertise Balls' letter on the website and in the newsletter, (b) to devise a leaflet/poster for distribution to philosophy departments and university careers offices, (c) to discuss with the PRS whether they would be interested in involvement in this, and (d) try to secure a meeting with the next Schools minister after the election.

ACTION: HB, Mark A, TS

10. New universities update

HB reported that the agreed actions from the last meeting were now in progress: Mark A was liaising with journal publishers re consortium agreements, and HB had emailed philosophers in new universities asking if they would like to be listed on the BPA website as a way of increasing visibility. She reported that she had had a positive reaction to this so far. In addition, the THE had published an article on philosophy in new universities, making the point that with some undergraduate philosophy programmes closed or under threat in new universities, there is a danger that the study philosophy becomes the exclusive preserve of students with the best A level grades.

HB and Mark A to continue to pursue the consortia issue and the website listing, and then to liaise further about next steps.

ACTION: HB, Mark A

11. AOB

MM raised the possibility of the BPA being involved with a conference on the 'nature of the university', addressing issues such as governance and management, and impact. The Committee was enthusiastic about this; MM and HB to think about how to take this forward.

ACTION: HB, MM