

BPA Heads of Department Meeting

30 November 2010, Institute of Philosophy, London

MEETING NOTES (Helen Beebee, Dec. 2010)

Present: MM McCabe (KCL; President, BPA), Helen Beebee (Birmingham; Director, BPA), Ian Rumfitt (Birkbeck), Carrie Jenkins (Nottingham), Luc Bovens (LSE), Mark Addis (BCU; BPA Exec), Rob Hopkins (Sheffield), Alison Ainley (Anglia Ruskin), David Corfield (Kent), Sorin Baiasu (Keele), Dan Hutto (Hertfordshire), Paul Snowdon (UCL), Jane Heal (Cambridge), David Papineau (KCL), Leon Horsten (Bristol), Cristina Chimisso (OU), Alison Stone (Lancaster), Emma Borg (Reading), Michael Brady (Glasgow), Joanna Hodge (MMU), Dory Scaltsas (Edinburgh), Richard Gray (Cardiff), Mark Cain (Oxford Brookes), Anandi Hattiangadi (Oxford), Paul Noordhof (York), Aaron Ridley (Southampton), Jim Grant (London Met), Matthew Kieran (Leeds), Greg Currie (Nottingham), Catherine Abell (Manchester)

Discussion with Chair of REF Sub-Panel (Alexander Bird)

See AB's notes. Other issues raised included:

- Anonymity: would it be possible to assess outputs anonymously? (Unlikely to be feasible given (a) published work includes a lot of references to/ways of identifying the author and (b) work is read by experts in the field who are often familiar with the outputs already.)
- Equality & diversity: Had there been, or could there be, statistical analysis of the data from RAE 2008 to check for gender bias? (None had been undertaken, and now impossible since ratings of individual outputs were destroyed.) Would it be possible to undertake such an analysis after the REF? (Possibly.)

Working conditions and career progression for non-permanent staff (Dawn Philips/Helen Beebee)

Both DP's and HB's discussion documents were made available to the delegates, briefly presented, and discussed. Issues raised included:

- Career progression for people who are excellent teachers but not sufficiently research-oriented for standard lectureships. If such people are willing to take a succession of temporary teaching positions, even though they have minimal long-term career prospects, shouldn't they be allowed to do so? Should permanent teaching-only positions become more common? On the other hand, is research-led teaching is a good marketing ploy for (future) high fee-paying students? Do permanent teaching-only contracts encourage a potentially dangerous distinction between teaching and research, making teaching-only HEIs or departments seem more acceptable?
- Different funding bodies' research grant rules are patchy when it comes to encouraging full-time/non-teaching-only temporary replacements for staff with research grants. (E.g. Leverhulme Major Research Fellowships and Mind Fellowships)

require replacement by a full-time temporary lecturer; AHRC Fellowships and standard research grants work in such a way as to encourage more piecemeal arrangements.)

- Improved conditions for temporary staff (especially teaching staff) often means worse conditions for permanent staff; not everyone will agree that this is an acceptable trade-off. Similarly, the flexibility offered by e.g. the AHRC Fellowship scheme allows staff to apply who cannot fully be released from teaching/admin duties.
- Contracts that give a lump-sum payment for delivery of a whole module are often particularly poorly paid, radically underestimating the time required for preparation and marking.

HB to make DP's report and other relevant documentation available on the BPA website and to redraft the BPA report in the light of the discussion.

Impact in the REF (from HEFCE: Paul Hubbard, Head of Research Policy, & Kimberley Hackett)

See slides from the presentation that Kimberley spoke to.

The major issue discussed focussed on the distinction between dissemination/knowledge transfer/public engagement and impact. HEFCE were clear that there would (or may) be some scope for different sub-panels to use different indicators, so that the distinctive kinds of impact delivered by different disciplines could be recognised.

On the other hand, they were equally clear that impact is to be seen as *benefit* (to society, the economy, individuals, etc.) Merely enjoying or finding interesting a public lecture, radio programme, etc. is therefore unlikely to count as genuine impact.

The message was that while this does not automatically rule out public engagement-type activities (public lectures, being on *Start the Week*, doing a *Philosophy Bites* podcast, or whatever), great care needs to be taken on exactly what kind of 'benefit' is being claimed, and the presentation of clear evidence that it has actually been achieved. (Things like positive feedback and viewing/attendance figures might be acceptable but definitely only as *part* of the overall story.)

Other issues raised included:

- The research for which impact is claimed needs to be of at least 2* quality. But how is this to be measured, and what happens if the panel judges that it falls below the threshold for 2*? (It seems that 'indicators' for research quality will be used here; this is something that panels will have to determine, but indicators might include things like publication of the research in peer-reviewed journals or the research being the outcome of funding where the proposal was peer-reviewed.)
- The assessment of impact will place a big proportion of a department's REF score in the hands of a small number of individuals. E.g. with 10 staff, each staff member's publications will be worth 6% of the overall score (assuming 60% on outputs). With 1 case study and 25% on impact, one member of staff could be responsible for over 30% of the overall score.

- A narrative on the support of impact activities will be expected. It is likely (but not yet definite) that this will be a part of the 'environment' narrative and not part of the impact part of the assessment.
- There have been rumours that a minimum size will be imposed on units of assessment. It was confirmed that this rumour is baseless; there are no plans to impose such a limit.
- Educational impact could in principle count, but it would have to be substantial and it *must* be impact outside the HE sector.

Discussion of Browne Review

The discussion focussed on what the philosophical community could do to increase awareness and understanding of the benefits of philosophy, both as a degree subject and to society and individuals more generally.

Issues discussed, comments and suggestions included:

- Philosophy as a degree subject: important to ensure that demand remains good despite the Browne Review's fixation on career earnings. HB to investigate producing some material on this; relevant points/suggestions included:
 - Find data on careers 2 years after graduation, where philosophy does well (unlike 6 months after graduation, where it doesn't).
 - Find GRE data (again, philosophy does well here).
 - NSS (ditto)
 - Include what philosophy offers students more generally, rather than just 'transferable skills'.
 - Include some case studies of philosophy graduates? (Both what they got out of their degree and what they're doing now.)
 - Think about audience – not just prospective students but also parents and schools.
 - Produce a single brochure and/or materials available online for departments to use as they wish?
 - If in brochure form, could seek potential advertisers to minimize cost.
- Value of philosophy more generally – again, different potential audiences need to be considered (e.g. HEIs, general public, media), and they may require different kinds of focus/argument.
- Philosophy is in a precarious position in new universities, with degree programmes being axed with alarming regularity.
- Consider running a 'media lunch', perhaps as a BPA/IP joint event.
- BPA/FEP 'Valuing the Humanities' panel discussion at LSE: HB mentioned this in the hope that some people would be able to attend. [Now taken place. Audience of over

200; podcast available at www.bpa.ac.uk/news/bpa_news/valuing-the-humanities-podcast]

Again, HB to consider ways to take this forward. All offers of help, further suggestions, pointers to existing material, etc. gratefully received.