

BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
Executive Committee meeting

Tuesday 17 May, 2011
Senate House, Malet St, London

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Maria Alvarez, Helen Beebee, Michael Brady, M. M. McCabe, Chris Hookway, Tom Sorell

1. Apologies: Mark Addis, David Bain, Jeremy Butterfield, John Callanan, Gordon Finlayson, Gillian Howie, Adrian Moore, Alessandra Tanesini

2. Minutes of the last meeting: Approved

3. Matters arising

Item 3/3/12, AHRC 'Future Directions' consultation: HB was to feed back to the Committee her experience on the AHRC grants panel with respect to impact. It was noted that the 'pathways to impact' and 'impact summary' were now compulsory parts of AHRC applications. After a general discussion concerning the strengths and weaknesses of philosophy AHRC applications and peer reviews, it was agreed that a discussion of good practice for writing and peer reviewing AHRC applications should form a part either of the next HoD meeting or the 2012 AGM. (Issues included a somewhat blasé approach to the methodology section of the application, and peer reviews where high grades were not backed up with sufficient justification.)

ACTION: MB

Item 3/3/8, BIS review of UK postgraduate provision: Lapsed.

Item 3/5(c), KCL cuts: MM agreed to liaise with DP to find a form of words that could be used for inclusion in BPA literature on its activities (e.g. website, 2011 newsletter).

ACTION: MM

Item 3/9, Philosophy in schools update (b) MM and TS still to arrange a meeting with the Education Secretary, Michael Gove; the construction of a leaflet/poster and/or be reconsidered after this had taken place.

ACTION: MM, TS

Item 3/10, New universities update: Web listings for philosophy UG and PG programmes in new universities still need to be completed.

ACTION: HB

Item 6(a), MPs: HB had not approached the relevant MPs (Norman, Pugh) with a view to establishing a relationship with the BPA. MB reported that he had had a discussion with his local MP but they showed no interest. MB and MM to discuss relationships with MPs and to pursue if appropriate.

ACTION: MB, MM

Item 6(b), Middlesex: It was agreed that the general policy of responding to requests for assistance rather than volunteering unasked would apply here.

Item 6(c) REF: HB had received a copy of the letter from Willetts to CUCD, and it said much the same as his response to the BPA. The BPA's recommendation for Sub-panel Chair (Alexander Bird) had been accepted by HEFCE. The HoD meeting had taken place and AB had made a presentation and answered questions at it.

Item 7(a) WiP committee: HB had circulated the draft minutes.

Item 7(b) Contract staff working group: A draft policy document on contract staff had been agreed by the Exec over email. The draft was then discussed at the HoD meeting and revised in the light of discussion and approved by the Exec; the final version, together with associated documentation, was now available on the new 'policy' section of the website.

Item 8, Conference/media lunch: The plan for a combined conference/lunch had been superseded in the light of Martha Nussbaum's availability (see Director's Report); HB and MB to liaise over possible future media lunch jointly organized by the IP and the BPA.

ACTION: HB, MB

Item 9, REF sub-panel nominations: HB had requested nominations for sub-panel members from HoDs and submitted all the responses. There was no formal consultation with the Exec, but sufficient numbers of women, and a reasonable spread of specialisms, were achieved. It was noted that the final sub-panel was made up of 50% women (excluding users) but there were no representatives of new universities.

Item 10, Departmental and LS membership fees: The proposed different fee levels based on size of departments had not been implemented for 10-11 but would be implemented for 11-12.

ACTION: HB

4. PRS Subject Centre

Clare Saunders had been invited to make a presentation outlining the current and future status of the PRS Subject Centre. CS reported that the Subject Centre would cease to exist in its current form in September 2011, with 2011-12 being a 'transitional' year. Subject-specific support would come from the central HEA based in York, with one half-time PRS post supported by generic A&H 'academic development officers'. Project grants and funding for consultancy work were due to continue and CS noted that the latter in particular was a place where the BPA might be able to pursue specific funded activities.

CS noted that the HEA intended to continue to maintain relationships with subject associations, but it was unclear how exactly this would work; it was agreed that Mark A and CS would keep a close eye on developments in this regard to ensure that academic subject specialists continued to be consulted about and involved in the HEA's philosophy-specific activities.

HB reported that the PRS had been in touch with her and Mark A with a view to offering funding for specific activities that preserved the legacy and continued some of the activity of the PRS. It was agreed that a bid would be made for two specific activities: (a) incorporating some existing PRS material in the BPA website (Chris Tebb, who designed the PRS website, would be employed to do this) and (b) piloting a national 'philosophy open day', aimed at school pupils (not necessarily studying philosophy or RS), teachers and school careers advisors.

The following were agreed:

- Depending on the success of the first event, these to become an annual fixture, rotating around different parts of the country that are accessible to large numbers of people. The first event provisionally agreed to take place in Birmingham.

- There was a need not merely to enthuse potential students, but to educate them, their teachers and careers advisors, and, indirectly, their parents about the employment potential of philosophy graduates. The outcomes of the proposed meeting with Gove could feed in here, with the prospects for a career in teaching for philosophy graduates emphasized. (TS to provide HB with the email address of the PGCE co-ordinator at Birmingham.)
- The events should include accessible talks by university-based philosophers with the core aim of making philosophy an attractive and interesting subject to pursue at university for a diverse range of school pupils (in terms of A level subjects, ability and social background). Material on employability should also be incorporated.
- Good attendance is essential to success. HB to explore various sources of contacts, including the PRS (and through them BUPs), the RIP (Jacobsen Philosophy in Schools programme) and the Birmingham Outreach team. Discussion with the latter over the best timing for the event was also important.
- Howard Simmons could be used as additional admin support for the Birmingham event.

CS noted that an application for funding was needed by the end of May; HB to follow up.

Finally, there was a discussion of the possibility of a 'philosophy in pubs' initiative, in order to raise the profile of philosophy amongst the general public. CS reported that a 'Café Philosophique' already existed in Leeds, on the model of the Café Scientifique, and that this might serve as a good model. MB to take this forward.

ACTION: MARK A, HB, TS, MB

5. Director's report

(a) Threats to departments: The BPA had been involved in activity surrounding proposed closures of programmes and units at Keele, Greenwich and London Met. The immediate threat at Keele had been removed but the long-term future of both PEAK and the philosophy programme within SPIRE had not been definitively secured. Greenwich had closed its SH philosophy degree but there had been no redundancies and JH programmes would continue. LMU's management had confirmed its decision to close philosophy and some other disciplines completely; HB had then complied with a request to forward the original BPA letter to the non-academic members of the LMU Board of Governors.

There was a discussion about whether the BPA should draft a document containing advice aimed at departments on how to deal with immediate threats, but it was agreed that this might be counter-productive, and the current practice of pointing those who are seeking BPA help in the direction of individuals with experience of successfully dealing with relevantly similar situations was the best way to proceed.

(b) Website hacks: HB reported that the BPA website had been hacked twice in the last few weeks. Chris Tebb had dealt with these speedily and efficiently, but cleaning the site was not cheap; HB and CT were in discussion about how to find a long-term solution.

ACTION: HB

(c) Consultations: HB reminded the Exec that she had responded to the UUK/GuildHE consultation on external examining. It was agreed that it was not worth responding to the current EU consultation given the EU's lack of interest in including substantial amounts of humanities research within its Framework programme.

(d) HoD meeting: This was held in November and had been very successful. It included a discussion of the situation of temporary contract staff, the REF (with Alexander Bird), impact (with Paul Hubbard and Kimberley Hackett from HEFCE), and the Browne Review. It was agreed that, funding permitting,

this should be an annual fixture and was an excellent opportunity to engage the subject community in issues of common concern and disseminate information and advice.

(e) Valuing philosophy: MM, Maria A and GF had organized, in collaboration with the FEP, a very successful symposium at LSE with Martha Nussbaum and others as speakers. It was agreed, however, that the philosophical community in general, and the BPA in particular, needed to ensure that philosophy continued to be actively promoted to a variety of audiences. Prospective UGs are being dealt with under the Open Day proposal (see item 4 above), and a section of the website will be devoted to this audience when it is reorganized (see item 4). HB was still to follow up various proposals made at the HoD meeting; there was also the media lunch proposal (see item 3). It was agreed that this would again be an agenda item for the next HoD meeting, and that the discussion should include the ways in which philosophers can promote themselves to internal institutional audiences (VCs, Deans, etc.).

ACTION: HB, MB

6. Financial report

HB reported in Mark A's absence that while the overall balance is fine and there is no immediate problem, expenditure is still exceeding income. She noted that membership has finally crept over 300, with the vast majority of members paying by standing order, but that there was still a lot of room for improvement. She requested Exec members who had not yet done so to send emails out to staff in their designated departments asking them to join, and noted that the BPA was so far receiving around 3-5 new membership applications from each department that was targeted.

ACTION: HB, ALL

7. Committee members and officers 2011-12

HB reported that 4 members of the Exec were coming to the end of their terms: AM, JB, GF and MB. Of these, AM and GF were ineligible for re-election and JB did not wish to stand for re-election. There would therefore be 4 positions up for election, with only MB standing again.

HB would cease to be Director and supernumerary member of the Exec from July. MM would have one more year as President and supernumerary member. Pending confirmation by the new Exec after the elections, the officers would be MM (President), MB (Director) and Mark A (Treasurer).

8. A level philosophy/EBacc

There was some discussion about whether the EBacc proposal (EBacc = 5 GCSEs including one humanities subject (apart from English), designated as either history or geography) was likely to have a negative impact on philosophy UG recruitment. It was agreed that HB would seek clarification from Mark A on whether the shrinking provision of philosophy AS and A level was a prediction or a current fact (and if the latter, what the figures are), and why the EBacc proposal would lead to a drop in takers of RS GCSE (is it because pupils are not currently forced to take history/geography and so those taking only 5 GCSEs are currently taking RS but in future will not?). It was felt that the BPA's efforts in retaining UG recruitment might best be directed at other activities (e.g. the Open Day and website development, although Mark should bring to the Exec any proposals re the EBacc situation that might be appropriate. It was also agreed that TS would raise the question of numbers taking philosophy and RS qualifications as school level at the upcoming AQA meeting.

ACTION: HB, Mark A, TS

9. New universities

It was agreed that the parlous situation of philosophy within new universities was a very serious issue that the BPA needed to address, and as a first step there needed to be more engagement between the BPA and philosophy staff at new universities. The inclusion of the list of new university philosophers and philosophy programmes on the BPA website had built some bridges but more needed to be done. It was agreed that the next HoD meeting should be prefaced with a meeting for new university philosophers, in order to foster a sense of common cause and to discuss specific situations and strategies. HB to check with Herjeet that all the new universities listed on Mark's document are represented in the HoD mailing list. It was also agreed that every effort should be made to consider recruitment to new universities at the proposed Open Day, e.g. by ensuring that a wide range of schools are invited (with help from university outreach staff) and that the focus is not solely on single and joint Honours programmes but also on broader humanities programmes with a philosophy component.

ACTION: HB

10. Impact and the REF

There was a discussion about whether or in what way the BPA should act to ensure that impact submissions to the REF nationally are of as high a standard as possible. On the one hand, it was noted that the BPA's policy is that the impact of philosophical research should not be assessed in the REF. On the other, the general (though not unanimous) feeling was that since that battle has, at least for the moment, clearly been lost, the discipline's interests are best served by making sure that departments are well informed about the requirements for impact case studies and are helped to think creatively about the kinds of activity that might result in good case studies.

It was agreed that HB should do some preliminary work on this, with MB to take over later since nothing should be made available to departments until the guidelines and criteria have been fixed.

ACTION: HB, MB

11. Schools report

(a) AQA: TS reported that he had succeeded in getting more qualified philosophers involved in interactions with the AQA, including two people who now sit on AQA sub-committees dealing with syllabi. He was also working towards ensuring that more suitably qualified people are acting as examiners.

(b) Answers website: TS was working on getting the exam boards to take a more active role in directing schoolteachers towards the site, since this is what would make the biggest difference to usage levels. It was agreed that the website, with associated support, should be given a further year and then reviewed again, particularly given that some of HS's time might be redirected towards support for the Open Day and therefore funded by the PRS.

ACTION: TS

12. AOB

(a) Big Society: MM noted that the Chief Executive of the AHRC had not responded to the letter signed by various learned societies and other bodies, including the BPA, but it was agreed that no further action would be taken at this point.

(b) Outgoing Director: HB was thanked for her work as Director and showered with very heavy gifts.