

## **BPA Heads of Department Meeting**

14 September 2012, Senate House, London

### **MEETING NOTES (Michael Brady, Sept. 2012)**

**Present:** Michael Brady (Glasgow; Director, BPA), Alexander Bird (Bristol; REF subpanel Chair), Mark Cain (Oxford Brookes), Tim Chappell (Open University), Emma Borg (Reading), Michael Lacewing (Heythrop; BPA Exec), Fabian Freyenhagen (Essex), Matthew Nudds (Warwick), Brendan Larvor (Hertfordshire; BPA Exec), David Corfield (Kent), Matthew Ratcliffe (Durham), Stephen Burwood (Hull), Bill Mander (Oxford), Tim Crane (Cambridge; BPA Exec), Giuseppina D'Oro (Keele), Vince Geogheghan (QUB), Paul Snowden (UCL), Yasemin Erden (SMUC), Jonathan Tallant (Nottingham), Mark Textor (UCL), Sarah Sawyer (Sussex), Christopher Ryan (London Met), Alessandra Tanesini (Cardiff; BPA Exec), Peter Osborne (Kingston), Michela Massimi (Edinburgh), Aaron Ridley (Southampton).

#### **REF 2014: Question and Answer session with REF subpanel Chair (Alexander Bird)**

Alexander Bird answered a number of questions he had received from HoDs, and then took questions from the floor. The questions are divided into three categories.

##### 1. Overall assessment and management

Q1. What specific problems might small departments face, and how should they address these?

A. There are disadvantages to being small. Regarding 'Impact', small units will have to submit two case studies; this might not be too much of a concern if the unit has 14 people, but it will if it has three. So there is a clear incentive for small units to join up with other subjects to address this problem. Regarding 'Environment', although the sub-panel will try to take size into consideration, there are things that bigger units will be able to do that smaller units might not – for instance, run a flourishing postgraduate programme with a lot of students, invite prestigious overseas speakers, etc. Although small units could try to address this by joining up with other subjects, it is not clear that there is a benefit on this question unless you can make the case that there is a general shared interdisciplinary environment. Regarding 'Outputs', if you do join up with other subjects then the submitting institution and subpanel can request that submissions are sent to particular subpanels – for example, that work in the history of science can be assessed by History as well as by Philosophy, and there can either be a combined assessment or the assessment from the 'external' subject. Finally, the REF does not expect REF UoAs always to map neatly on to institutions units, and so there is no penalty attached to UoAs constructed from different units and individuals in an institution.

Q2. What is the smallest number, in terms of critical mass, for a positive Environment score?

A. Environment is important. And often with smaller departments there is less chance of having a thriving postgraduate community, and so on. In addition, smaller units may not to

have the institutional support to present the unit as well as it might. So smaller units (indeed, all departments) might be advised to look at the environment documents from RAE 2008 that are online: in particular, consider the results, see who did well for environment, and look at what they said in support of their case.

Q3. If a new unit has been set up recently – for example, 2002 – can a case be made for a reduction in the impact cases?

A. There is no allowance for reduction in numbers of case studies for new units. There is no particularly clear guidance to panels about how they should handle case studies from institutions in this position. It is clearly in the interests of the subject and academia generally that the creation of new units should not be discouraged and so I hope that the sub-panel would aim to look as favourably as possible on the submissions of new units, taking into account the difficulties they face, and so to some extent the assessment will be relative to what is conceivable for such a unit to achieve. There are, however, limits to this—it would be difficult to award 4\* to a case study that on unrelativized standards is very mediocre, even if it is a very commendable effort in the light of the newness of the unit.

Q4. Suppose that a case for a member of staff with complex circumstances has been made. Can a reserve item be submitted, if it is not obvious that the case for reduction will be accepted?

A. Reserves are only allowed for double-weighted items. Moreover, decisions about reduction are made by the equalities panel, rather than the subpanel, so the latter doesn't have room for liberality on this. (See para 94 for this.)

Q5. Can we assume that statutory paternal leave doesn't count as ground for reduction?

A. Yes, that doesn't count in and of itself. However, there is special provision for what is known as 'additional paternal or adoption leave'

Q6. Are part-time staff with appointments elsewhere (e.g. USA) able to be submitted?

A. Yes, provided that they have a .20 contract on the date of census. There is, nevertheless, a question as to whether such people can make that much of a contribution to the research environment.

Q7. Should Early Career Researchers with four pieces capable of being submitted nevertheless be encouraged to submit fewer items, if these are of higher quality?

A. The strategy to adopt to maximise income will be to have the best profile (i.e. maximal % in the 4\* and 3\* categories), for a given number of FTEs submitted. So if the ECR's optional items are 2\* it is unlikely to be worth including those items; if 3\* or 4\* it may be better to include them. See what the effect on the overall profile is. (Note: this point applies to those cases where one has decided to submit the individual—its just a matter of how many items to submit. There is a different point regarding whether someone should be submitted at all. If an ECR is submissible with just 1 item, it will usually be worth doing just that, even if the only item of that ECR is 2\* or even 1\*. That is because the disadvantage of making the profile a bit worse is more than offset by the benefit of increasing the multiplier by a full FTE.

## 2. Impact

Q1. Is there a problem if the individual research which forms the basis for the case study is not submitted in the outputs?

A. No. All that the panel has to do is to persuade itself that the underpinning research is at least 2\* quality. (Since 2\* research won't be funded, it will be common for an item that is expected to receive 2\* not to be in the outputs.)

Q2. Are case studies involving people no longer in a department possible?

A. These are fine, provided that the underpinning research was done in the submitting institution.

Q3. How will the subpanel determine whether the underpinning research is 2\*?

A. If necessary by reading it. But proxy measures (e.g. if it is in a quality journal) might also be used. The subpanel won't be actively looking to rule such research out. Nevertheless, it is important for you to show that the *research* as well as the impact is closely or directly related to the submitting unit.

Q4. Can an impact case in two units of assessment?

A. Yes. If the underpinning research is the result of a collaboration between members of two (or more) units of assessment (and the research of both contributed to the impact), they can both submit the impact

Q5. Must the research be in the unit or (simply) in the institution?

A. The unit.

Q6. Is promise of impact taken into account?

A. No.

Q7. Are impact cases considered in terms of 'maturity'?

A. No.

Q8. Will there be assessment of impact in the next research exercise?

A. Probably yes. There is little chance of this being removed, and a strong chance the percentage of impact will be increased.

Q9. How many case studies are there per member of staff?

A. 2 studies for 14.99 submitted staff (FTEs—so 2 0.5 staff count as 1 FTE); 3 studies for more than 14.99 submitted FTEs up to 24.99; 4 case studies for up to 35.99 FTEs; and so on, in increments of 1 case study for every 10 additional submitted staff FTEs.

Q10. How should we approach impact within academia but beyond the home institution?

A. Transforming the availability of resources – for instance, by providing research materials that are used in teaching – isn't by itself enough for a strong outcome. For a good mark something out of the ordinary needs to be shown – such as a *very* popular textbook or similar. Or research that changes the *way* that a subject is taught.

Q11. What if two case studies from one unit of assessment come from the same person?

A. That is fine.

### 3. Outputs

Q1. Are co-authored or multi-authored pieces looked down upon?

A. No – see documents and instructions about this. Nevertheless, you will have to say something to justify co-authored submissions, explaining the nature and quantity of the contributions of the authors.

Q2. Are new editions or translations – e.g. of classic texts – able to count as research outputs?

A. Such work can be highly regarded, depending upon how much research and philosophical work has gone into doing the translation and producing the new edition.

Finally, AB said that he would be happy to hear directly from those to whom he could not give definitive answers, and from those with further questions about the REF.

### **Discussion of grant applications and peer reviewing**

MB presented notes from Helen Beebee, which represent a personal and anecdotal view of what philosophers need to do to improve their grant applications, and what referees on peer review college need to do in order to give philosophy applications a fair chance at getting funded. (Notes from report attached.) The response to the points that HB raised was positive; further suggestions and Issues raised in discussion included the following.

- Accepting the point that a minimalist impact statement might be preferable to one that goes overboard, nevertheless applicants shouldn't say that their work has *no* impact. Discussion and dissemination on blogs et al count, so we should be sure to highlight such things in the application.
- It was thought that the PRC might sometimes be doing their job too well in raising objections to the central questions and themes; other subjects are not usually as picky as philosophy. And it is rarely if ever the case that the panel will give a mark higher than that given by the reviewers. So reviewers shouldn't undersell the application.
- Although the referee report is now the chief advocate for the application, it was also thought that criticism from the reviewers can nevertheless be helpful. For one thing, it might pre-empt footling objections from the non-philosophers on the panel. For another, a good response to genuine criticism can improve an application and raise the chances of its being funded.
- People in other disciplines usually have no idea what philosophers are doing, and this is one reason for lack of success in grant capture. Part of the problem here is that philosophers often introduce the proposal with comments such as 'In the recent philosophical literature', as if this is enough of a reason to take the proposal seriously. Communicating the *question* that you are trying to answer, rather than make comments on things in the recent literature, is vital. So start with an *intelligible* question.

- Philosophers do tend to be hard on themselves; and philosophers often present what they are doing in terms of social science rather than in terms of the other humanities. This predilection from science might count against us.
- Only projects that receive agreed marks of very high 5 or 6 will be funded; so referees need to bear this in mind if they do indeed think that the project deserves funding.
- Institutions often have a good peer review scheme involving reviewers outwith philosophy, before applications are sent to funding bodies. So it is a good idea to make use of such internal opportunities.
- When you write the grant application, have a copy of the instructions to hand and write with this in mind.

### **Discussion of BPA Leaflet on Building Profile and Resisting Closure**

BL spoke to the document which was previously circulated. He noted that most of the leaflet was written by Mark Addis, and that it contained a number of excellent suggestions and additions by the BPA Exec. It is also important to note that some of these will take time to achieve, especially because staff in departments under threat are also doing a lot of research, teaching and administration at present. Taking on more external work is of course burdensome. The document was very well received.

Some further suggestions were made and advice given. These included:

- Don't be hostile to events in other disciplines; attend their seminars, and invite them to attend yours.
- It is important to resist the rhetoric of critical mass; the individual researcher is still paramount.
- Think about the possibility of offering philosophy sessions for local primary schools.
- Students taking religious studies at A and AS level do philosophy of religion and ethics. So if you want to develop links with local schools with a view to offering to help with philosophy provision, target those teaching religious studies, and suggest staff members with interest in philosophy of religion and ethics.
- Think of ways in which philosophy can contribute to continuing professional development – for instance, courses in ethics for medics, or business and management students or professionals.

### **Discussion of GTA Terms of Employment**

MB spoke to a report from the BPA & BPPA concerning a nationwide survey on Philosophy Graduate Teaching Assistant Terms of Employment. He noted the report's suggestions of drawing up clearer GTA contracts and urging administrators to guarantee that no GTA is working for below minimum wage. The meeting welcomed the report and thought that the main issues were very important. However, there was a general feeling that (i) more information of a particular kind needs to be sought, and (ii) advice on things other than GTA pay was very important.

(i) more advice and information from HoDs, and/or those in charge of PGT and PGR programmes, needs to be gathered. In particular, it would be good to know (a) how much power HoDs have to set teaching rates and how much access they have to the teaching budget; (b) how many hours do HoDs ask GTAs to spend on marking for exams, preparation, office hours, feedback sessions, in addition to teaching; (c) what kind of training for teaching and support of teaching do departments provide for GTAs. It was felt that asking these questions of HoDs with respect to expectations of and support for GTAs would be more useful than asking GTAs directly about the hours they work in addition to teaching and preparation.

(ii) HoDs thought that GTAs were in the main interested more in given the right kind of advice about teaching, teaching support, training, and career development than in issues of pay as such. In particular, departments should give them clear guidance of the hours they are expected to teach, prepare, and mark.

Given this feedback, MB will write to HoDs asking for the kind of information above, will collate this and then suggest a further advice document for GTAs on pay and other issues to do with career development.

### **Other business**

Recruitment Drive: MB noted that BPA reserves are slowly but surely dwindling, and that we need to ensure that all philosophers in the UK are asked to join the Association. He will write to HoDs asking them to forward information about joining the BPA to colleagues, especially those who have recently joined departments.