

British Philosophical Association
Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held at Senate House
on 1 March 2005, 11am

Present: Helen Beebee, Stephen Clark, Brad Hooker, Dan Hutto, Dudley Knowles, Onora O'Neill (Chair), Georgia Testa (minutes), Tim Williamson, Jo Wolff,.

1. Apologies: Robin Attfield, John Dupré, David Evans, Katherine Hawley, M.M. McCabe, Tony McWalter, Tom Sorell.

2. Presentation from Clare Saunders, PRS

Clare outlined the role of the subject centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS). It was conceived as a forum for sharing ideas about teaching philosophy and for people to learn from each other. Therefore, its role is facilitative rather than prescriptive. A unit has been set up specifically to work with graduate students.

UUK are currently consulting on the regulation of teaching standards. The plan is to streamline the programmes found in different universities or to use these to establish a framework for accreditation and training of lecturers. Clare agreed that PRS would work with the BPA to create a joint statement in order to make a politically stronger case. She also agreed to find out and inform us of the timings of this exercise; i.e. when the draft will be put out to consultation and how long the period of consultation will be, in order that we know how long we have for internal dialogue.

Of particular concern is the issue of second and third year progression or mixed level teaching. The worry is that the HEA will impose benchmarks that conflict with subject specific methods of teaching. Therefore, the widespread practice within philosophy of mixed level teaching needs to be defended on its subject specificity merits. The PRS need to clarify what exactly is the concern with mixed level teaching which it failed to do in the document on progression prepared for the BPA. Once this was done, Jo Wolff offered to circulate the document to BPA members for feedback before preparing a joint case to the HEA.

Jo Wolff requested that the PRS, as a matter of routine, pass on consultation documents to the BPA.

The PRS is piloting a programme in Yorkshire and the North East for postgraduate training that focuses on delivering generic, subject specific skills, and provides opportunities for networking, of particular value to those in smaller departments. The plan is to roll this out across the country. The worry was that larger departments would develop their own programmes in conflict with those provided by PRS. Or, with AHRB stress on providing training for postgraduates, set up programmes before the PRS project was rolled out to their region. It is hoped that Sheffield will join up to the pilot programme. This would provide valuable support and hopefully encourage larger departments to consider the PRS programme when it is extended to their regions.

Clare made clear that the PRS is open to ideas about what exactly are the subject specific skills that training programmes should provide. Tim Williamson commented, on the draft plan for workshops, that the content should be reorganised so that it more

closely matched the skills needed by graduate students at different stages in their career. For example, have workshops for new research students and others for completing students. It was also thought that in order to create confidence in the relevance and quality of the information, the workshop sessions should be given by respected philosophers rather than general communications experts. In particular, sessions providing training on presentations need to inform about how to deliver a good *philosophy* presentation.

However, while such workshops could be beneficial, the thought was that there should also be a system and resources for meeting individual research needs, such as training in academic German.

3. Minutes of Meeting Nov 10th 2004 were approved with minor amendments.

4. Matters arising from meeting November 10th 2004

(i) Success stories.

Georgia Testa received a limited response to requests for information on alumni, sent to departmental secretaries (as agreed at the 10th November meeting). More names were provided during the meeting. Jo Wolff will collate the information for the web site.

(ii) FISP.

The BPA have now joined the Federation of International Societies of Philosophy. David Evans is attending the FISP meeting and has agreed to report back to the Committee.

(iii) Philosophy at Birmingham.

Jo Wolff reported that it had been decided to restore the department to its former strength. The BPA's interest and effort had impressed the Birmingham authorities, and had been a contributory factor in the favourable decision. Four new positions, including a Chair, are to be advertised.

(iv) Co-option:

Gordon Finlayson accepted the invitation to join the committee

(v) Creation of Reserve Fund

The following societies received a request for the following amounts in early January. So far only the Scots Phil. Club have agreed to the request. Analysis and the RIP will consider the matter in June. The Aristotelian Society will consider the matter in April but request further clarification as to why such a fund is needed and what the BPA is likely to use the reserve fund for. Mind is still in the process of reaching a decision

<u>Donation</u>	<u>Requested</u>
Analysis Trust:	£1,000.00
Scots Philosophical Club:	£500.00
Aristotelian Society:	£1,000.00
Mind Association:	£5,000.00
Royal Institute of Philosophy:	£1,000.00
	<u>£8,500.00</u>

(vi) Membership Drive

Membership numbers had increased to 275 from 226 in November. Fifteen of these new members were teachers. Jo Wolff suggested that, in future, we try to send personalised recruitment material to teachers rather than include our material in the mass mail outs arranged by Michael Lacewing. Some thirty new members were due to the activities of members of the Executive Committee.

Forty-three philosophy departments have corporate membership. This includes new departmental memberships for Keele, Roehampton and Manchester. Renewals for three others were outstanding. It was reported that Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College will not be renewing, as there is only one member of staff teaching philosophy, and the subject will be phased out over the next two years. It was agreed to contact the sole member of the department to see how the BPA could help.

The UK Kant Society was the only new learned society membership. In December, recruitment material had been sent to:

The Association for Legal and Social Philosophy
Northern Association for Ancient Philosophy
Society for Applied Philosophy
Collingwood Society
European Society for Philosophy and Psychology
Nietzsche Society
UK Kant Society (who joined)
Marx and Philosophy Society
British Society for Phenomenology
Welsh Philosophy Society
Welsh Institute for Philosophy

(vii) A level teaching

Jo Wolff and Tom Sorell have been appointed to the QAA Advisory committee for Philosophy and related subjects. This should allow further contact and an understanding of how to exert some influence. Their first meeting, to approve exam papers and discuss quality control of marking schemes, takes place shortly.

Onora O'Neill raised the question of whether we should also have an interest in the philosophy component (Theory of Knowledge) of the International Baccalaureate. She has a contact who may be able to advise us on this examination and syllabus.

(viii) RAE

The BPA had co-ordinated with other organisations in making nominations to the panel. The suggestion of Anthony Duff as Chair had been followed, and at least one other nomination accepted (Mike Martin) but full panel membership has not been announced. However, it was confirmed that BPA advice to increase the size of the panel had been accepted.

(ix) Poll of members.

Members had been polled on whether the BPA should issue policy statements, and, if so, on what areas and by what methods. Relatively few responses were received, but a great

deal of caution was expressed – a significant number of people did not want to be ‘governed’ by the BPA. It was agreed that the BPA should be not be prescriptive, and that it should limit any policy statements or intervention to narrow, profession-related, subject-specific issues. It was agreed that maternity leave, and career breaks generally, did not fall into this category.

5. Matters held back Nov 10th

(i) Web Site

It was decided that while the web site needs to be simplified so that it is easier for users to locate information, that it was not desirable to have the site redesigned by professional consultants.

(ii) QAA

It was decided to pursue contact with the QAA (in connection see 4 (vii) above).

(iii) AHRB,

(a) The BPA lobbied the AHRB to simplify the Post-Grad application forms. The AHRB held a meeting to discuss these forms. Mike Otsuka (UCL) attended and was not optimistic about the likely outcome. It was decided to see what happens this year and then judge whether we need to renew our complaint.

(b) The AHRB proposed to come up with a list of top journals in a number of subject areas. Tim Crane (UCL) organised a letter of protest signed by 31 heads of departments. Jo Wolff talked to the THES about the BPA’s stance, and a story confusing the BPA with Tim Crane’s initiative appeared, to our advantage. The AHRB have suspended consultation on this matter. However, it is likely that they will come back to this issue. They need to be able to evaluate the success of research leave they have funded, especially when they become a research council (the AHRC). Therefore, the BPA need to consider how to approach this issue.

The AHRB need ex post and ex ante performance measures in order to demonstrate that they make a contribution to humanities research and have good assessment criteria for the allocation of research funds. The latter is supposed to facilitate the former. However, with their ex ante stress on deliverables, there is a tendency for people to use research leave for easily deliverable work rather than necessarily their best work. Hence the need for a more quality-based assessment of the outcome of AHRB funded research.

The AHRB need some objective standard against which to measure the quality of research. While a citation measure may be less distorting than a ‘top 10’ list of journals (which the AHRB was proposing), citation indices miss specialised work of high quality but limited circulation. There was a suggestion (from Onora O’Neill) that the focus should be on the publishing rates of philosophy monographs, rather than journal articles. A further suggestion was that there could be peer review of AHRB funded research, which could cover both articles and monographs, and which would be more inclusive a measure than citation indices. A more general measure of the quality of philosophy in the

UK, rather than a measure of specifically AHRB funded research, can be found in the Leiter Report, which shows that UK Philosophy has a high international reputation

(iv) Philosophy Career Guide

This is will be looked into over the coming months, building on the various models currently provided.

(v) Accountability and Regulation

A number of recent developments have led several members to suggest that the BPA should initiate a debate on the type of accounting and regulation regime we would design for ourselves, as a focus for discussion. This was postponed for future discussion.

(vi) Maternity leave

A member had asked whether the BPA could formulate a statement about how maternity leave and other career breaks should be taken into account in assessing applications for promotion, and the relation between the RAE and equal opportunity. In line with 4(ix) above, it was agreed that this is not an area suitable for BPA involvement. Also see 6 below.

New items

6. Role of BPA

Members have enquired whether the BPA is able to support individuals in the way a trade union might. The Committee were of the opinion (which is consistent with the constitution) that this should not be our role. Rather our role is to promote the interests of philosophy as a subject and profession. In line with this, we can support individuals if they are involved in a dispute about what professional philosophers should do. Appendix 1(a) to the constitution states that the BPA should provide ‘support for individual professional philosophers, whether members of the Association or not, in performing their professional duties’.

7. ABRB

The AHRB has started consultation on strategic mode funding. The BPA was asked to assist in the identification of thematic areas that could be considered as the focus of potential future strategic research programmes. The Committee was of the view that it would be divisive to suggest such areas as it would inevitably involve or be seen as involving favouring particular subject areas. They were more concerned that there was no philosopher on the selection panel which makes decisions about funding, and that the first two multi-disciplinary strategic programmes, in the areas of ‘Diaspora, Migration and Identities’ and ‘Landscape and Environment’ had no philosophy component. In addition, the general view was that we need to be assured of the intellectual rigour of the selection process.

8. RAE

In previous years, the Political Studies Association has created a 'shadow panel' with which the results of the main panel could be compared. This has been thought helpful for departments treated harshly. The Committee decided not to support creating the same for philosophy for the reason that it is difficult to unpick decisions retrospectively.

Furthermore, there is the issue of the cost of such an exercise.

The Royal Academy of Engineering has produced a paper designed to influence RAE panels. It was decided not to follow this lead for philosophy because the BPA will be in a constructive relationship with the panel.

9. Life Memberships

A member had suggested that we should offer life memberships. This was accepted and a cost of 10 times the current membership price for those under 60 and 8 times for those over 60 was agreed.

10. Training of A level teachers

Even though Philosophy is growing as a school subject, it remains very difficult for philosophy graduates to gain places at teacher training college. It was decided, as a first step, to write to enquire what current policy is on the matter before making any intervention.

11. Philosophy in Britain

This charitable organisation is a spin-off of the NCP but is now dormant. It was decided not to attempt to 'take over' the organisation in order to acquire charitable status by association. Instead, it was agreed that if they offered to wind themselves up and transfer their funds to us that we would be happy to discuss the matter. However, the initiative must come from them.

12. Stanford Encyclopaedia

At JISC's request we circulated to members a request to fill in a survey that will aid JISC in the decision as to whether to help finance the SEP on behalf of British education.

13. Members for Re-election

Tim Williamson, Dudley Knowles, Katherine Hawley and David Evans come to the end of their term this year. Dudley and David have expressed a willingness to stand for re-election and are supported by the Committee. Katherine and Tim do not wish to. Georgia was asked to put out a call for nominations by the end of term.

Jo and Tim agreed to sound out candidates from Oxford to stand in place of Tim. Dudley agreed to ask the Scots Phil Club to nominate a candidate to replace Katherine.

An item for future discussion concerns whether the Scots Phil. Club should take on the role of the BPA in Scotland, given their influence and the difference in the Scottish education system.

14. Items for the newsletter

It will be necessary to produce another newsletter this year. One item already suggested is to give accounts of successful AHRB bids in Philosophy. The Committee agreed to email suggestions for other items to Jo in time for a newsletter to be produced for circulation at the Joint Session in July. It was decided to circulate the newsletter more widely than the membership as a way of promoting the Association. Helen Beebee, organiser of the BSPS conference just prior to the Joint Session, agreed to include the newsletter in their conference delegate packs, and Jo Wolff agreed the same on behalf of the Aristotelian Society.

15. AOB

No other business was discussed. The meeting closed at 4.30pm.

The next meeting will be at the Joint Session in Manchester on Sunday 10th July at 1pm.
The AGM will be at Manchester on Monday 11th July at 9.30pm.