

British Philosophical Association
Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting
held at Manchester University
Hulme Hall, Music Room
10 July 2005, 1pm

Present: Helen Beebee, David Evans, Gordon Finlayson, Brad Hooker, Dan Hutto (from 1.20pm), Dudley Knowles, Tony McWalter, Tom Sorell, Georgia Testa (minutes), Tim Williamson, Jo Wolff (Chair).

1. Apologies received: Robin Attfield, Stephen Clark, John Dupré, Katherine Hawley, MM McCabe, Onora O'Neill.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 1st March 2005 were approved.

3. Treasurer's Report

Dan Hutto was delayed so Georgia Testa delivered the report, which had been circulated beforehand (see web link).

The Committee was of the opinion that we need to increase our income without increasing subscription rates. One option agreed was to get a publisher to sponsor the annual newsletter or possibly include advertising.

4. Officers for 2006-7

Onora O'Neill(Chair), Jo Wolff (Secretary) and Dan Hutto (Treasurer) will reach the end of their term in July 2006. As their leaving at the same time would cause considerable disruption it was agreed that we should try to stagger their leaving. Informal discussions will be conducted to decide how to manage this issue. However, Onora O'Neill will definitely stand down. Therefore, we need to sound out possible candidates for the Chair who would then be required to stand for election to the Committee in 2006. If the constitution does not allow either of Jo Wolff or Dan Hutto to extend their terms of office without election by the members, we will propose a change to the constitution at the next AGM.

It was decided that the Committee should appoint officers to deal with specific issues, thereby investing in them the authority to act without the time-consuming and inefficient requirement to refer decisions back to the Executive or Secretary. However, it was agreed that if an officer was required to give a public statement on behalf of the BPA, that they should consult the Committee or Chair first. The constitution will need to be consulted to identify whether the Committee is empowered to create these additional posts and, if not, to propose an appropriate change to the constitution at the 2006 AGM.

On the basis of their past and current involvement, Tom Sorell was appointed as Officer for Pre-University Philosophy and Helen Beebee was appointed as HEA Liaison Officer. The decision as to whether to appoint a Scottish Affairs Officer was deferred, not least because two individuals from Scotland were standing for election to the Committee and the results of the election would not be announced until the following day. There was also discussion of whether there should be an Officer for Research Affairs. As well as the issues surrounding AHRC measures of quality, and the RAE, there is a further potential problem connected with the AHRC. Other research councils are requesting that authors whom they fund place their funded research in an open access repository. Science publishers have strongly objected to this proposal. It is possible that the AHRC will try to introduce a similar requirement to which humanities publishers are also likely to object. Further discussion was postponed until the next meeting.

In connection, it was decided that Jo Wolff should ask the British Academy and AHRC about their policy concerning peer assessment of research and, if they have no policy, to ascertain their plans on this issue.

5. Philosophy Benchmarking Statement

The QAA wrote to the BPA reminding us that subject Benchmarking Statements are subject to review every five years, and hence it is time for the Philosophy Benchmarking Statement to be reviewed. In order to determine whether it is still fit for purpose, we sent a questionnaire to all members on 5 July asking them:

1. Have you ever had reason to consult the Benchmarking Statement?
2. If so, was it of help?
3. Are there any reasons for the Statement to be revised in any way? If so please elaborate.
4. Do you have any further comments?

Some replies have already been received. Most respondents had not consulted the benchmarking statement. Those who had, found it useful in some respect and praised the general openness of it, in stressing intellectual virtues (such as honesty) as well as intellectual skills. The general view was that it was still fit for purpose but that if anything were to change the general spirit of the statement should not change. So we will inform the QAA that there is little evidence of the need to update the statement.

The Committee commended the NCP for its work in formulating the statement.

6. Event for School and College Teachers

An email was received from a member who is teacher of philosophy, asking in what way the BPA could be said to benefit her. The issue of engaging more with our teacher members has been raised in previous meetings. The email prompted Jo Wolff to devise a questionnaire which was emailed to all teacher members asking whether they would be interested in the BPA organising events for teachers and, if so, what kind of events.

Some responses have been received. The desire most commonly expressed was to be more connected to academia and more informed of new developments in the discipline. Unfortunately, we do not have the funds to pay for teachers to attend events. It was decided to try to forge an alliance with the RIP who also have an interest in AS and A2 teaching, and who have the funds for events. If this is not possible, we may still be able to stage events which teachers can afford to attend by drawing on career/professional development funds which we believe exist in schools.

7. AS and A2 Level Consultation

The AQA sent a consultation document which needs to be replied to by December. Our view is that the BPA should be consulted on matters concerning the syllabus and exams, as the subject association for Philosophy. However, Tom Sorell was of the view that we should pursue an alliance with the RIP as the most effective way of influencing how philosophy is taught in schools, given that there is little scope for the syllabus and marking methods to change in the short term.

8. Dates of meetings 2005-6

It was decided to continue holding meetings in early November, early March and at the Joint Session.

9. Replacement of Executive Secretary

Dan Hutto has administrative assistance for half a day per week, paid for by his department. This will mean that he has someone to help him with the Treasurer role - process membership payments, maintain the membership database, handle the renewal process, pay bills/expenses and compile monthly accounts. The BPA email address can be redirected to his assistant. However, Jo may need administrative support to deal with the activities Georgia previously managed or helped with (election, co-ordinating correspondence with the Exec, preparing agendas, minuting meetings, typesetting the newsletter). Even if this is the case and his assistant will need to be paid from BPA funds, the amount paid in administrative support will be considerably less than that paid to Georgia, thereby cutting the annual expenditure and probably resulting in a profit for 2005-06 (if current membership levels are maintained).

10. Membership criteria

The Committee discussed whether to open membership to those with a BA in Philosophy and who, although they have not continued to study the subject, have an ongoing interest. This was prompted by a recent request for membership from someone who fitted that description but who we had to turn down because she failed to fulfil the current criteria for membership. It was decided not to alter the criteria as this would weaken the claim to be a 'professional' association. Therefore, the minimum criterion for membership remains a commitment to philosophy above BA level. Registration on an MA course suffices.

11. Review of membership charges

At the 2004 AGM it was agreed that there would be an annual review of membership charges by the Executive Committee prior to the AGM and any increases put to the AGM for approval. The Committee decided not to increase membership charges so early in the life of the Association.

12. Any Other Business

The issue was raised as to whether the BPA should try to arrange/promote a week-long series of conferences and activities along the lines of that organised by the APA. At the moment, while there is a week long series of Philosophy conferences that runs from BSPS, through the Joint Session to BSET, these are not always at the same location and have no unifying events. This was postponed for future discussion.

The meeting closed at 2pm. The next meeting will be in London in early November, the date to be determined after consultation with Committee members.