

British Philosophical Association
Minutes of the BPA Executive Committee meeting held at UCL
22 April 2004

Present: Robin Attfield, Helen Beebee, Robin Cameron, David Evans, Katherine Hawley, Brad Hooker, Dan Hutto, Dudley Knowles, Tony McWalter, Onora O'Neill (Chair), Georgia Testa (recording the minutes), Tim Williamson, Jo Wolff

Apologies: Stephen Clark, Roger Trigg

1. Minutes of the last meeting

These were agreed to be correct and signed by Onora O'Neill.

2. Matters arising from the minutes

i) Appointment of Executive Secretary

Georgia Testa accepted the post and was present at the meeting to take minutes. Conditions or employment are still under consideration.

ii) Co-options

Robin Attfield and Tony McWalter accepted their invitations and were present at the meeting. Jo Wolff reported that Stephen Houlgate had yet to respond to his invitation.

iii) Geoffrey Crossick

Jo Wolff reported further that Geoffrey Crossick, the Chief Executive of the AHRB, has yet to respond to his invitation to speak at the AGM in July.

iv) Charitable status

It was agreed to pursue charitable status afresh in the future and so allow the Charity Commission to close the file on our initial application.

v) Change to individual membership criterion

The following suggestion from Tim Williamson for a new membership eligibility rule was accepted by the Committee: Full individual membership of the Association is open to individuals who are competent to teach or pursue research in Philosophy, as demonstrated by their training or achievements. This would include teachers of philosophy in schools, research students but not undergraduates. However, research students would pay at a reduced rate equivalent to the Associate Member rate. Associate membership would become a category confined to members of affiliated learned societies. The new structure of membership and the eligibility criterion will need to be approved by the AGM.

It was also proposed that the Treasurer should assume the role of Membership Secretary and so be empowered to make decisions about eligibility for membership in the case of disputed applications. This, too, requires the approval of an AGM as the constitution states that the Executive Committee be responsible for such decisions.

vi) FISP

The FISP bylaws were considered to be compatible with the proposed new open membership criterion and that, as a successor organisation to the NCP, the BPA would satisfy FISP membership criterion. The annual fee would be approximately £80 which was considered to be affordable. David Evans undertook to write to FISP regarding our proposed membership.

3. Treasurer's Report

As of 18 April, there were 195 full members, 21 associate members, 44 departmental members and 7 affiliated societies. This represented income of £4410. It was agreed that we need to increase membership and that we should provide a membership leaflet to delegates at the Joint Session.

There was a total of £6562.25 in the bank as of 11 March (the last date for which statements were available). Total income was £8991.53 and total outgoings were £2429.28. The income included a £1500 setup grant from Mind and £2149.53 transferred from the NCP.

4. LTSN Report

Helen Beebee is now a member of the PRS (Philosophical and Religious Studies) Subject Steering Group. They propose to look at the possibility of seeking AHRB funding for the PRS Subject Centre to host a national-scale Philosophy research training programme and are seeking the BPA's support for this. The Committee was of the view that the PRS Subject Steering group had not made clear exactly what they were proposing to provide. Helen was tasked to find out specifically what was proposed. Second, she was to convey the Committee's suggestions about

how to improve training of research students nationally and see whether the PRS Subject Group would consider support for them. These were: sharing best practice between departments; holding workshops/seminars at post-graduate conferences on presentational skills, how to prepare for the job market and how to get published (sessions to be taken by those involved in the training of research students rather than by the LTSN); and providing grants to students to enable them to attend such training sessions.

5. A Level Teaching

The AS level in Philosophy was introduced in 2001 and taken by 1889 candidates. This rose to 3001 in 2002 (the last year for which figures were available).

Tom Sorell met with Michael Lacewing of Heythrop College in January. He runs courses for teachers of A Level philosophy and A levels involving philosophy. Many of these teachers have no philosophy training. There is also a concern that the courses are out of touch with recent developments in the subject. Furthermore, examiners are not necessarily trained in philosophy and so competent to assess exam scripts. It was decided that the BPA should consider approaching the AQA in an attempt to improve the A level.

6. Philosophy in Wales

i) Swansea

The BPA has been in touch with Mario von der Ruhr from the Philosophy Department and Professor Noel Thompson, acting Head of Department. A letter was sent to the VC and a similar letter to all members of Council, who received many such letters. We also offered to give practical assistance in helping the department, and gave advice on updating the department's business plan. Despite all this, current plans are for the department, and others, to close and, it seems, for all teaching of Philosophy to cease. The AUT is taking up a legal challenge but there is little hope of success. No more students are being taken for philosophy.

ii) Welsh Institute for Philosophy

The aim is to highlight, strengthen and maintain the importance of philosophy in Wales, the current state of which is one of depleted resources and inadequate funding. The WIP seeks to reverse this trend through a concentrated and sustained effort to promote philosophy in Wales. They were hoping for affiliation or support from the BPA but it was considered more appropriate for them to affiliate to the BPA. Dan Hutto was tasked to approach them on this matter.

iii) Lessons from Swansea

We need to make departments aware that we are there to help them when they are threatened so that we can get involved at a useful stage. It was agreed that we need hard facts about the value of philosophy courses to provide to VC's, MSP's and Welsh Assembly members to make the case that philosophy courses are an essential part of a university's education provision. Suggestions as to the kind of information we need to collect were: a) the employment destinations of philosophy graduates; b) the number who have some contact with philosophy courses; c) national statistics on application trends. UCAS figures could possibly be provided on payment. HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) figures are dated but suggest that there are 6000 home students and 350 foreign students registered on philosophy courses. There was also a suggestion that we make accurate figures (when we acquire them) available on our web site.

7. Better Regulation Task Force

Jo Wolff met with them and presented our sense that the burden of regulation for departments was not experienced as lifting, and that the new inspection regime created uncertainty which encouraged cautious behaviour by universities. Our view that regulation is justified only if a clear risk is identified agrees with the BRTF's guidelines. Jo's view was that, unfortunately, the BRTF has little influence with the AHRB.

8. AHRB

i) Peer Review College

Several nominations have been made or encouraged.

ii) Postgraduate Review

The AHRB has been informed that Brad Hooker and Tim Williamson will represent the BPA in any consultation exercise. The AHRB now requires that departments provide an individual case for the training needs of applicants for AHRB funding, with details of how the department expects to meet those needs. It was explained that the complexity of the new form is due to the move to unify schemes for different award bodies. This has resulted in the issue of individual training regimes appropriate to science research degrees arising inappropriately in the case of arts research training degrees. It was decided that Jo Wolff request a meeting with the head of studentship competitions to discuss our concerns.

9. Membership Drive

It was agreed that the Joint Session and AGM were an occasion where we should seek to gain new members.

10. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

The SEP has reached a point where it needs more funding. We were asked to publicise this on our web site. It was agreed that as the SEP is free to use and a valuable resource that we should publicise its existence on our web site.

11. RAE 2008

HEFCE has been informed that they should consult with the BPA, as the successor organisation to the NCP.

Philosophy is being included in the same panel as Classics, Theology, History et al and the Committee is satisfied with this arrangement.

12. HE Bill

Onora O'Neill reported that though the bill is generally believed to contain many faults that it is likely to be passed, as there is no alternative to it.

13. External Examining

It had been suggested that the BPA maintain a register of current external examiners and/or those willing to act as external examiners. The Committee identified problems with the policy: a) external examiners have to be accredited and so inclusion on a register based on willingness to act as an examiner would be inappropriate or complicate matters; b) external examining is not popular and so any register might be short and would not, therefore, be very helpful. Jo Wolff and Dan Hutto were of the opinion that this would be more appropriately handled by the LTSN. However, it was agreed to reconsider this matter in the future.