



**THE BRITISH  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
ASSOCIATION**

**Newsletter 2005**

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*Secretary – Professor Jonathan Wolff*

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# **BPA Newsletter 2005**

## **Contents**

Introduction .....	3
Review of 2004-5.....	4
AS and A2 Philosophy, and Application Trends in Philosophy Undergraduate Studies.....	5
AHRB/C Grant Awards .....	6
The AHRC and the International Standing of Research in Philosophy in the UK: an analysis of RAE 2001.....	8

Editor: Jonathan Wolff, Secretary, BPA  
Department of Philosophy, UCL,  
Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT (j.wolff@ucl.ac.uk)

# Introduction

This is the second full year of the existence of the BPA, and in this newsletter we report some of the recent activities and interests of the Association.

In addition to the review of the year, which follows this introduction, we draw attention to the growing importance of **Philosophy as an AS and A2 subject**. We would hope that our growing numbers of members who teach Philosophy in Schools and Colleges will make known to the Association any concerns they have so that we can gain a better understanding of how best to represent you. Any communications should be sent to [admin@britphil.ac.uk](mailto:admin@britphil.ac.uk).

Much of this newsletter is devoted to the activities of the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the hope of widening the debate about its role and function in relation to Philosophy and related subject areas. Consequently we report on the allocation of around £6m in **project funding in Philosophy** since 1999. We also include an item on **monitoring and evaluation** of research, drawing on an analysis of submissions to RAE2001. Once more we would be very pleased to receive communications on these issues.

## Review of 2004-5

In its second year of operation the BPA has continued to expand its range of activities, while at the same time increasing its **membership numbers**. At the time of writing we have 299 individual full members, of whom 39 are teachers of philosophy in schools and sixth form colleges, as well as 9 associate members. We have 47 Philosophy Departments as members as well as 15 Learned Societies. We are very grateful to all for your continued support. The Society still has plenty of room for growth, but current signs and trends are very promising.

At the suggestion of a member, the Committee has agreed to make **life memberships** available at a cost of 10 times the current membership price for those under 60 and 8 times for those aged 60 or over. Please contact the Executive Secretary if you wish to take out a life membership.

The seriousness with which the academic world takes the BPA was tested earlier this year when we initiated discussions with the members of the **Philosophy Department at Birmingham**. The Executive became alarmed on

hearing of the further loss of senior members of department, and on making enquiries was even more alarmed to hear that closure was under discussion. The BPA was able to offer support to the Department in preparing for a high-level review, and took part in the review process itself. The outcome has been the decision to restore the Department to its former strength. In the words of Jeremy Jennings, Professor of Political Theory at Birmingham, "closure was a serious option and the BPA's involvement was crucial in avoiding this outcome".

This development is particularly important for Philosophy given the previous year's depressing events at Swansea. The BPA regards providing such services to departments as part of its mission, and the earlier we are alerted to any problems the more likely we can make an intervention with positive results.

The BPA has been active in the **RAE Consultation**. Our suggestion that the sub-panel should be expanded to the maximum permitted size was echoed by others making submissions to HEFCE and was accepted without question. Many Philosophers nominated by members of the BPA, through the Association, were also invited to join the sub-Panel. We intend to continue to be a major point of contact between the profession and HEFCE on this matter, and are delighted that Professor Antony Duff, Chair of the Philosophy sub-Panel, will lead a discussion on this at the BPA's AGM on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2005, in Manchester. Other sub-Panel members will also be present.

It may be recalled that there were numerous complaints from departments that the **AHRB/C forms** for post-graduate studentships had become unnecessarily burdensome to complete. Prompted by the BPA the AHRB held a consultation on this matter, and accepted the need to change the forms. So far, reports for this year have been favourable, but we would welcome further information from those who currently handle these forms to see if additional changes are necessary.

The last year has seen the funding and implementation of **Training Requirements** as part of the AHRB/C studentships. Various activities are being attempted throughout the country, in some case with the support of the **Learning and Teaching Support Network**. The BPA would be happy to act as a clearinghouse for information, and would be pleased to hear of examples of training sessions that our members might like to publicise, in order that examples of good practice can be shared.

Last year we asked for examples of '**success stories**': those who had taken a degree in Philosophy who had achieved at a high level in some other field. A

page dedicated to this is now available on the Association's website at [www.britphil.ac.uk/success.htm](http://www.britphil.ac.uk/success.htm)

At the time of going to press the **elections for next year's Executive Committee** were in process. The results will be posted on the Association's web site as soon as they are known. In the meantime we would like to offer our thanks to Katherine Hawley and Tim Williamson who have reached the end of their terms and have decided not to seek re-election to the Committee. Their contribution to the Association has been highly valued.

## **AS and A2 Philosophy, and Application Trends in Philosophy Undergraduate Studies**

Admissions tutors for undergraduate programmes may have noticed increasing numbers of applications in recent years. Official UCAS figures for single honours applicants report a rise in application from 6,090 in 2000 to 9,003 in 2005 (March figures). The number of places available has also risen, but the signs appear to be that they have not quite kept pace, although complete 2005 figures are not yet available. It seems possible that there will be increasing pressure on places in future years.

Part of this rise is explained by a general increase in applications to the humanities. However there is a special factor in Philosophy: the growth of Philosophy as a school and college subject. It appears that the new practice of allowing students to take four subjects at AS level has led to an increased interest in Philosophy at that level, initially often just for the experience of taking something new and different for a year. However a proportion of students expecting to drop the subject at A2 level find themselves sufficiently interested to continue with it, and a proportion of these then apply to study Philosophy at University. All the signs are that this is a growing trend. This is in addition to the students studying Philosophy as a component of a Religious Studies A2 programme.

The growth in interest can readily be seen. The AS level was introduced in September 2000. Figures on the AQA website show 2214 taking the AS level examination in its first year (2001) with 1168 that year taking the old version of the A level. By 2004 AS numbers had more than doubled to 4677 and A2 numbers risen to 2101. There remains huge potential for growth as increasing numbers of schools and colleges are showing an interest in teaching the subject.

In these circumstances it seems important for University Departments and schools and colleges teaching AS and A2 Philosophy to be aware of each other and to be able to work co-operatively, as well as to work with the AQA in developing the syllabus. Thought also needs to be given to the question of how the increasing demand for Philosophy teachers in schools is to be met. These are issues of pressing concern, and the Committee is in the process of beginning to address them. The BPA would be very pleased to receive communications on these issues.

## **AHRB/C Grant Awards,**

Last year's newsletter mentioned the increasing importance of the various grant schemes now made available to Philosophers through the AHRC. Excluding the Research Leave Scheme, where by now hundreds of small awards have been made, since 1999 around £6million has been awarded to projects which appear to be primarily within the scope of Philosophy, under a number of different schemes. These are reported on the AHRC website, and we simply list them here.

It is unclear what the future will hold in this respect. The move to 'full economic costing' may mean that the schemes cannot be continued in their present form, but we await further details. In the meantime we would be especially pleased to hear from members concerning their experience of the funded-projects with which they have been involved, especially those which have reached completion

A new edition of Jeremy Bentham's writings on logic and language

Amount Paid: £106,853

Professor Frederick Rosen, University College London 1999

An evolutionary approach to the concept of animal suffering

Amount Paid: £57,672

Professor Alan John Holland, Lancaster University 2001

Ancient commentators on Aristotle

Amount Paid: £315,322

Professor Richard R K Sorabji, King's College London 1999

Ancient Commentators on Aristotle

Amount Paid: £270,009

Professor Richard R K Sorabji , King's College London 2003

Attention and the knowledge bases of expert practice

Amount Paid: £32,046

Professor Michael Luntley , University of Warwick, 2003

Capabilities and wellbeing: operationalising the capabilities framework

Amount Paid: £31,556

Dr Paul Anand, The Open University, 2004

Catalogue of the papers of Jeremy Bentham at University College London Library

Amount Paid: £136, 392

Professor Philip Schofield, University College London, 2002

Catalogue of the papers of Sir Isaiah Berlin

Amount Paid: £170,638

Mrs Mary Clapinson, University of Oxford, 2000

Causal understanding: empirical and theoretical foundations for a new approach

Amount Paid: £223,251

Dr Christoph Hoerl, University of Warwick, 2004

Causality: Metaphysics and Methods

Amount Paid: £214,965

Professor Nancy Cartwright, London School of Economics, 2001

Contingency and dissent in science

Amount Paid: £298,064

Professor Nancy Cartwright, London School of Economics, 2004

Global Justice and the Environment

Amount Paid: £259,572

Dr Simon Caney, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2003

Greco-Roman philosophy in the first century BC

Amount Paid: £416,589

Professor David Sedley, University of Cambridge, 2004

Innateness and the Structure of the Mind

Amount Paid: £313,735

Dr Stephen Laurence, University of Sheffield, 2001

Logical and Metaphysical Foundations of Classical Mathematics

Amount Paid: £450,492

Professor Crispin Wright, University of St Andrews, 2000

Perception, discourse and conceptual art: a philosophical investigation

Amount Paid: £48,120

Dr Peter Goldie, King's College London, 2003

Philosophical foundations of public policy: rethinking cost-benefit analysis

Amount Paid: £51,064

Award Holder Name: Professor Jonathan Wolff, University College London, 2003

Philosophy of Biology

Amount Paid: £277,386

Professor John Dupre, University of Exeter, 2003

The AHRC Centre for Logic, Language, Mathematics and Mind

Amount Paid: £761,112

Professor Crispin Wright, University of St Andrews, 2001

The function of the emotions: an investigation of their evolutionary and an exploration of the philosophical consequences

Amount Paid: £133,840

Professor Mark Sainsbury, University of London, 1999

The Oxford Francis Bacon

Amount Paid: £294,420

Dr Graham Charles Rees, Queen Mary College, London, 1999

Towards an aesthetic psychology: the philosophy of aesthetic perception and cognition

Amount Paid: £102,570

Dr Peter Goldie, King's College London, 2003

Transcendental philosophy and naturalism

Amount Paid: £331,703

Professor Mark Sacks, University of Essex, 2004

Wittgenstein's Tractatus: Philosophy by means of logic

Amount Paid: £110,981

Dr Peter M Sullivan, University of Stirling, 2003

# The AHRC and the International Standing of Research in Philosophy in the UK: an analysis of RAE 2001

## Introduction

Now that Arts and Humanities Research Board has attained full Research Council status it seems an appropriate time to reflect on the type of world that is likely to be created for philosophy in the coming years and to explore what can be done to influence this for the best. The creation of the AHRC creates both opportunities and threats, to adopt the terminology we are being encouraged to use. The opportunities are clear: far greater funding for research, both large project based and for research leave. The threat has become an increasing concern to many; that the pressures of a research council will distort research into an unwelcome direction. Here one issue is that the type of monitoring and reporting requirements that accompany research grants are encouraging people to take fewer risks, and thereby create less valuable work than otherwise they might have done. However a different issue is the main topic of this piece. The AHRC wants to be able to demonstrate that research in the UK meets the highest international standards. It has accepted the argument that citation indices are a poor method for assessing quality in the arts and humanities, and thus it has been looking for another method. This was the origin of the notorious and ill-fated 'ten journals' project in which heads of departments were asked to nominate the ten most important journals in their field, so that the AHRC could monitor whether it is funding work of the highest quality. This particular exercise was brought to a premature halt in the face of concerted protest from heads of departments and learned societies. (The role of philosophy departments in this process was reported on the front page of the THES.)

Sceptics might say that this was a defensive move by the departments and learned societies, worried that it is not possible to demonstrate the international quality of research in the arts and humanities. Hence it is important to consider what can be done in this respect.

Philosophy is in a different position to many other disciplines in the arts and humanities as we do have a resource with which we can enter the debate: the Philosophy Gourmet Report, founded and run by Brian Leiter at the University of Texas. Now opinions about the usefulness of the report vary. Some regret the influence it has had on the subject; others see it as a definitive guide to the research strengths of philosophy departments in the English-Speaking world, with a whole range of variation in between. However whatever we privately

feel about the Gourmet Report, and the accuracy in detail of its rankings, it has the feature that it is a type of peer review in which UK Philosophy Departments are ranked by a substantial number of international philosophers. In this comparison we do very well. One department is ranked in the top 3, internationally. In total 15 are ranked as equivalent to universities placed in the top 50 in the US. Over 20 are listed in the speciality areas as being of high standing in one or more areas of Philosophy. This is remarkable given the relative size of the countries and the fact that approximately ten times as many people in the US earn their living by teaching philosophy in universities as in the UK. It is also worth noting that UK departments are typically smaller than US, which may indicate a higher average quality of faculty.

There is little to be gained at this point at looking in detail at the Gourmet Report rankings. Another ranking exercise is, of course, the Research Assessment Exercise. This does not rank departments in exactly the same order. However we can generate a representative sample of internationally rated departments by taking those five which received 5\* in RAE 2001 together with a further 6 departments which received high ranking in the Philosophy Gourmet Report as well as a 5 in the RAE. The reason to go beyond the 5\* departments is to give a better representation of the range of interests and topics of research conducted in leading research departments in the UK.

This present study examines the submissions made by these eleven philosophy departments to RAE 2001, and thus is based on public records available from the HERO website. The great advantage of using the RAE submission as representative of what is regarded as work of the highest quality is that each item has been selected by its author as among the best work he or she has produced in the period. No attempt is made here to judge the quality of that work. Rather this study concentrates only on place of publication, to provide a snapshot of the nature of current publishing habits.

This particular contribution is not intended to settle any questions. Rather it seeks to establish a picture of what is currently being published by researchers who belong to departments recognized as being of international standards. This provides the necessary background to help develop informed answers to two questions: first, is there a measure which will capture what counts as work of international quality in philosophy; and second, would the adoption of any particular measure have a distorting effect on the way in which philosophy is published in the future?

## Summary of Results

The overwhelming majority of work is submitted to the RAE under the four categories: journal article; chapter in book; authored book; and edited book. The small number of 'other assessable' items listed have not been included. Also those scholars whose work was explicitly listed to be assessed by other panels (notably in linguistics) have not been included. This leaves 680 items submitted by the 11 departments included. (As this is an indicative list it has not been checked for clerical errors). They break down into the following categories:

**Journal Articles: 374 (in 122 different journals)**

**Chapters in Books: 174**

**Monographs: 109**

**Edited Volumes 21**

Among **journals**, the most frequently submitted are as follows:

*Mind* 35

*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 25

*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 16

*European Journal of Philosophy* 17

*British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 15

*Analysis* 14

*Journal of Philosophy* 11

*Philosophical Quarterly* 10

*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9

*Phronesis* 9

*Philosophy of Science* 8

*Synthese* 8

Among **chapters in books** OUP and CUP stand out with 40 and 38 respectively. Many of the CUP chapters are from Royal Institute of Philosophy annual volumes. Next comes Routledge (15) Kluwer (14) and Blackwell (13).

OUP is the biggest publisher of **monographs** submitted with 40 (Clarendon Press volumes have also been included in this figure.) CUP follows with 18, Routledge with 15 and Blackwell with 8.

Numbers of **edited volumes** are small: OUP and CUP each have 6, Routledge 4.

Further details are available on the BPA website, at:  
[www.britphil.ac.uk/raeme.htm#anx](http://www.britphil.ac.uk/raeme.htm#anx)

## Monitoring And Evaluation

The AHRC wishes to be able to judge the quality of the individual projects it funds. The 'ten journals' proposal was intended to be a way of showing that it is funding work of highest international standards. If we assume that the work surveyed in this study is indeed of a high international standard, then how much of it would be captured by such a project?

It is notable that the 12 journals listed above contain around half of the journal articles submitted. However this is still only around 20% of total output of leading research. Furthermore it is unlikely that all these journals could be used in the way envisaged. For example the Aristotelian Society invites individuals to publish a paper on whatever they choose – it is person based, not project based – and hence publication would be quite inappropriate to be used as an independent measure of the quality of the project.

To take an alternative approach, and again for illustration, it is possible to take the list of journals currently included on JSTOR. JSTOR maintains an electronic archive of a small number of journals. Although JSTOR is in the process of widening the list the 'first wave' of JSTOR was presumably the result of an exercise in trying to determine the most important philosophy journals. The journals included are:

*British Journal for the Philosophy of Science; Bulletin of Symbolic Logic; Ethics; Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism; Journal of Philosophy; Journal of Symbolic Logic; Mind; Noûs; Philosophical Perspectives; Philosophical Quarterly; Philosophical Review; Philosophy and Phenomenological Research; Philosophy and Public Affairs; Philosophy of Science; Political Theory; Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*

101 of the papers in the present survey were published in these 16 journals; a little over 15% of the 680 submissions.

It appears clear that if work of international standard is being produced in the UK, then work of high quality is being published over a wide range of journals, not all peer-reviewed, as well as in monographs and in chapters in books. Consequently monitoring by means of a limited list of journals will capture only a fragment of the work currently taking place. More worryingly, if any list of journals is given a privileged status this is likely to put individuals under pressure to attempt to publish there, thereby undermining the diversity, and

arguably also the quality of the work currently done in the UK. It would also put the editors of those journals in a difficult position, with a new dimension of both power and responsibility.

A further effect is also worth mentioning. At present a high proportion of the works in the survey are published in edited collections, often edited by a number of people, and also often the outcome of a conference or a collective research project. It is, then, worth making the point that edited volumes are perhaps the most visible example of collaborative work in Philosophy. Indeed such collaboration is increasingly encouraged by the AHRC and such volumes are included in the output of many AHRC-funded projects. Hence it would be problematic for the AHRC to take any course of action that would make people less willing to publish in such volumes.

Given this, it may be tempting to argue that citation rates are a better measure. After all, citation rates measure influence rather than place of publication, and so an influential paper in an obscure place of publication can still receive many citations. There are, however, at least two major problems with this. The first is that a paper may take some years to take hold in philosophy and so citation rates only become truly meaningful after several years. Second, citation indexes do not index all publications. In fact they only monitor the so-called 'ISI' journals. If, therefore, a paper is discussed at length in a book, an edited volume or a non-ISI journal such as *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* or *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, this will not appear in the Citation Index. In the present survey 228 papers appeared in ISI journals, meaning that almost two thirds of the items produced will not be inspected to see what they cite. It is very difficult to judge whether this would introduce a bias in the use of citation indices.

## **Conclusions**

One common response to this situation is to argue that the AHRC should not be in the business of evaluating research in this way. However the AHRC itself is responding to pressures from government, and if the community does not enter this debate we may find ourselves saddled with a system we find quite unsuitable. And we should remember that if the Gourmet Report is to be believed we have every reason to be confident about the standards achieved in this country.

Hence we must ask whether it is possible to develop any other measure of the quality of research, perhaps drawing on the RAE, or even the Gourmet Report to do so? Or perhaps we need to analyse journal publications in some other

way. The BPA would welcome communications from its members on this matter (to [admin@britphil.ac.uk](mailto:admin@britphil.ac.uk)) which will be placed on the Association's website. One point to keep in mind is that multiple measures may be better than any single measure. It may well better reflect the diversity of current research, and if so is less likely to have a distorting effect if all forms of excellent work can be captured.