



British Philosophical Association

British Philosophical Association

admin@bpa.ac.uk
www.bpa.ac.uk

Dear Vivienne

I am writing to you in response to your letter of 9 October, soliciting the views of subject associations on the European Reference Index for the Humanities and metrics-based research assessment.

We will respond to the second of these issues in due course, once we have had a chance to digest the Hefce consultation. In this letter, I shall therefore concentrate on the British Philosophical Association's views on the ERIH project.

We have no objection to the ESF's aim of 'identifying – and gaining more visibility for – top-quality European Humanities research in journal-based publications, whatever their language' (summary document available from ERIH website), provided that the judgement of 'top-quality' is based on sound objective principles such as openness to unsolicited contributions and double-blind peer review. This would produce a single list of journals whose methods of selection meet a particular threshold. There may be some use for such a list; for example, it may encourage best practice amongst journal editorial boards.

We share the British Academy's fundamental concern about the further division into categories A, B and C, however, and agree that this distinction is clearly – and we believe intentionally – a qualitative one. As the BA report points out, this is obvious from the way the categories are defined. We would like to add to that observation. The ESF documentation talks about, for example, the need to assess 'the comparative merit or strength of a given field' and the need for researchers and institutions to have access to a 'tool that facilitates ... assessment of the scientific quality of Humanities research output' (ibid.). If the A/B/C categorization is not intended to be a part of this assessment 'tool', so that the comparison is merely between publication in journals that appear in the list at all and those that do not, then there is no rationale for the categorization. If, however, the categorization *is* so intended, then it is, unavoidably, intended as a quality ranking.

Our view is that such a quality-based categorization is likely to have a serious and highly undesirable effect on the research culture within Philosophy. In particular:

- (1) The ERIH would distort the research culture within philosophy, in that people would have motivation to focus their research on areas that are well represented in the highest category. Broadly speaking, category A journals tend to be generalist analytical philosophy journals, together with some specialist journals which do not, collectively, cover anything like the full range of specialisms.

President:
Prof. Brad Hooker
Department of Philosophy
University of Reading
Reading
RG6 6AA
b.w.hooker@reading.ac.uk

Director:
Prof. Helen Beebee
Department of Philosophy
University of Birmingham
Birmingham
B15 2TT
h.beebee@bham.ac.uk

Membership queries:
British Philosophical Association
c/o Department of Philosophy
University of Hertfordshire
De Havilland Campus
Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AB
admin@bpa.ac.uk

Nor is continental philosophy at all well-represented. An aspiring philosopher wishing to maximize the chances of producing research perceived to be of high quality would therefore wish to concentrate on the areas that are well-represented in the A list.

This point should not be read as taking issue with the specific rankings in the current ERIH list; it is a general point that would apply no matter which specific journals were A-rated. No quality-based ranking can guarantee that all areas will be represented in the A-list, and any omitted area will be likely to attract fewer researchers in the long term.

(It should also be noted that 'generalist' journals are typically not generalist in the sense that articles on any topic are equally likely to be accepted. Generalist journals tend to focus on core areas of analytical philosophy; for example most of them will rarely, if ever, publish, say, a technical philosophy of science paper, or a paper on feminist philosophy, or a historical paper.)

- (2) The existence of the categories would inevitably change submission patterns, with lower-ranked journals losing submissions and higher-ranked journals gaining submissions. This would lead to an ossification of the categorizations, since the acceptance rates for A-ranked journals would decrease and those for B- and C-ranked journals would increase. This in turn could lead to the extinction of some lower-ranked journals; it could also involve an unmanageable increase in submissions for A-rated journals.

Finally, we are concerned about the ESF's intention to include edited collections and monographs in the next stage of the ERIH project (ibid.) The criteria here would be likely to be the perceived 'quality' of different publishers; and so similar issues to those described above would emerge.

We are grateful to the British Academy both for its careful consideration of the ERIH project and for giving subject associations the opportunity to make our views known. We would urge you to take up our concerns (which we imagine are widely shared amongst arts and humanities disciplines in the UK) with both the AHRC and the ESF.

With best wishes

Helen Beebee
Director, BPA

President:
Prof. Brad Hooker
Department of Philosophy
University of Reading
Reading
RG6 6AA
b.w.hooker@reading.ac.uk

Director:
Prof. Helen Beebee
Department of Philosophy
University of Birmingham
Birmingham
B15 2TT
h.beebee@bham.ac.uk

Membership queries:
British Philosophical Association
c/o Department of Philosophy
University of Hertfordshire
De Havilland Campus
Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AB
admin@bpa.ac.uk

President:
Prof. Brad Hooker
Department of Philosophy
University of Reading
Reading
RG6 6AA
b.w.hooker@reading.ac.uk

Director:
Prof. Helen Beebee
Department of Philosophy
University of Birmingham
Birmingham
B15 2TT
h.beebee@bham.ac.uk

Membership queries:
British Philosophical Association
c/o Department of Philosophy
University of Hertfordshire
De Havilland Campus
Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AB
admin@bpa.ac.uk