

British Philosophical Association
AGM
10th July 2006, Southampton University
Confirmed minutes

- 1. Apologies:** Onora O'Neill (President)
- 2. Minutes of Last AGM:** These were approved.
- 3. Matters Arising:** There were no matters arising.

4. Report on Elections

Helen Beebee and Jo Wolff were re-elected, and Alessandra Tanesini was elected, to serve a three-year term on the Executive Committee.

5. Officers for 2006-7

The Executive proposed:

- President: Brad Hooker
- Secretary: Jo Wolff
- Treasurer: Dan Hutto
- Administrator: Sacha Stephens

These proposals were accepted.

6. Change of Title of Secretary

The Executive proposed that the title of 'Secretary' should be replaced by 'Director'. This proposal was accepted.

7. Membership: Schools and Colleges

The Executive proposed the following amendment to the BPA's Constitution:

- 5 (ii) (b) philosophy departments or equivalent units within UK higher education institutions, COLLEGES OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS (hereafter referred to as 'departments'), and learned societies having among their principal objects the promoting of study in areas which are wholly or primarily philosophical (such members are referred to hereafter as 'corporate members').

This proposal was accepted.

8. President's Report

Onora O'Neill had prepared some notes on Hefce's proposed moves to metrics, which, in her absence, were tabled by Jo Wolff:

The Positive Points

that government has committed itself to the principle of dual funding, saying that they see it as the basis of any university autonomy, and as key to the health of many sorts of research (nevertheless, vigilance is called for to be sure that this commitment is maintained); that the HEFCE consultation is open minded about the use of metrics for the humanities; that there is recognition of imperfections, cost and burden of RAE.

The Problematic Points

- I. The principal argument for the move to metrics in the SIFF: Next Steps Report and elsewhere is that it is expensive and duplicates effort to measure research quality by peer review both prospectively (in awarding grants) and retrospectively (at RAE), given that the correlation between the two measures is high. This may be a good argument for (some) SET subjects, but not for humanities and only partially for the social sciences, where much research is not grant-based and has not been peer reviewed prospectively.
- II. If QR is too tightly tied to research council grant income (in the immediately preceding period) the dual support system will be undermined and university autonomy curtailed. Universities would face large incentives to funnel QR straight back to subjects that are in the running for (large) research grants. Allocating QR for subjects that do not attract grant money would risk a declining flow of QR. At that point it seems unclear why two funding streams are important.
- III. Any move to reliance on metrics in SSH subjects faces the problem that there will not be ready evidence that the metrics correlate well with quality as assessed by peer review, because there is typically only retrospective peer review at publication, and this evidence is scattered and hard to collect without some version of RAE. So retaining some form of overview based on peer review for SSH subjects will be important—for example an RAE, but not necessarily in its present form. Unless this is done it will be hard to know whether any of the metrics introduced is either a reliable or a valid measure of quality.
- IV. If the 2008 RAE is to go ahead but then be replaced by metrics, then it is important to know when the change in the basis for allocating QR is to happen. Metrics can be collected on an annual basis. How soon would revisions of the 2008 based allocations begin? Surely it would be wasteful to discard the RAE information the following year?
- V. If metrics are to be validated against RAE (presumably the point of the 2008 shadow exercise) then it is important to be sure that they remain reliable and valid indicators of research quality. However many of the metrics proposed are open to gaming, and arguably to more gaming than the RAE (how could one check this?). What moves could be used to ensure that scores on metrics **remain** an adequate measure of research quality? Would this require some version of RAE for all subjects? RAE lite?

VI. The suggestion in the HEFCE Reform of higher education research assessment and funding - Consultation Document that all forms of grant income should be taken into account in allocating QR would be damaging to UK research quality. User funded research is not subject to peer review, and the only competitive process used is tendering—it covers matters such as a local authority commissioning an evaluation of its parking arrangements. Competitive tendering is quite different from the competitive award of research funding on the basis of peer review. (Likely that Russell Group and 1994 Universities could unite on this)

VII. Has anyone costed the various proposed metrics? Some are evidently cheap. But are all of them?

9. Secretary's Report

I. Interim newsletter

In February an Interim Newsletter was produced and distributed by email, to keep members informed of activities.

II. ERIH

A project to rank journals into different categories had been presented by the AHRC, on behalf of the European Science Foundation, and ultimately the European Commission. This had created a huge amount of debate. The BPA had organised a response on behalf of the subject, and also helped arrange a published exchange on this issue in the Guardian newspaper, between MM McCabe, a member of the BPA committee and Barry Smith, a member of the Philosophy expert committee.

III. A level and School teacher's conference

The BPA has been taking an active part in the refinement and development of the A level Philosophy curriculum, which is currently under review. Tom Sorell is taking the lead on this, and he has also arranged a conference for School and College Teachers for Monday 20th November, in Manchester. Speakers are Simon Blackburn, Brad Hooker, and Anthony O'Hear.

IV. AHRC Issues

The BPA has lobbied the AHRC on its changes to monitoring of post-graduate students, pointing out some difficulties it is creating for departments. It has also been involved in discussions to improve the postgraduate funding competition, on which a consultation is presently in place.

V. Benchmarking

The BPA has been in discussion with the QAA concerning revisions to the Benchmarking Statement, and has sent in a somewhat revised version. Helen Beebee took the lead on this.

VI. Involvement at Joint Session

Questions had been raised about whether the BPA should become more involved with the Joint Session. It had been decided to revisit this issue once JW had stepped down from his current roles as Secretary of both the BPA and the Aristotelian Society.

VII. RAE

The ongoing consultation was noted.

VIII. UK Job Market

Members have asked whether the BPA could bring about a co-ordination of the UK job market on the model of the APA. The general view among the committee was that the differences between the two environments would make this extremely difficult to achieve.

IX. Website

A redesign is currently under discussion.

X. Newsletter

The annual newsletter will be produced and distributed later in the summer.

10. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report was tabled and discussed. [This report has been lost.]

11. Any Other Business: No items to discuss.

12. Date of Next Meeting: The next AGM would be at the University of Bristol on the Monday of the Joint Session.

The AGM was followed by a briefing from Professor Antony Duff, Chair of the Philosophy Sub-Panel for RAE 2008, and a Q&A session. Professor Duff agreed to make his presentation available on the BPA website.

