

**BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION**  
**Executive Committee meeting**

Tuesday 6 November 2007, 12pm  
Seminar Room, 19 Gordon Square, London WC1E 6BT

**CONFIRMED MINUTES**

**1. Apologies**

**Present:** *MM McCabe, Pauline Phemister, Mark Addis, Adrian Moore, Helen Beebee, Brad Hooker, Maria Alvarez, Tom Sorell, Dan Hutto, Jo Wolff, Hanne De Jaegher.*

*Apologies: Gordon Finlayson, David Archard, Alessandra Tanesini, Dudley Knowles, Duncan Pritchard.*

**2. Minutes of the last meeting**

Several additions and amendments needed to be made to the minutes of the March meeting, due to the sudden departure of the Executive Secretary. A final draft would be approved at the next meeting.

ACTION: HB

**3 Matters arising**

Item 5(i)b: Postgraduate Panel nomination: JW had agreed to apply for the AHRC Postgraduate Panel.

**4. Director's report**

**(a) Welcome to new members**

HB welcomed the three new members: Maria Alvarez, Mark Addis and Pauline Phemister; also the new Executive Secretary, Hanne De Jaegher.

**(b) British Library India & China Focus Group**

The British Library had contacted the BPA asking whether it would like to send a representative to attend a forum to discuss the impact of research publications coming from India and China. Jo Wolff had agreed to attend.

**(c) AHRC postgraduate research training funds**

From 2007-8, the AHRC have decided that the research training money it provides to institutions (around £800 per AHRC-funded research students) must be spent on generic, rather than subject-specific, research training. After some discussion it emerged that different institutions were interpreting this change in policy in different ways, with some passing the money directly to departments as before, and others holding back the money and requiring departments to bid for it.

**(d) Liaison with BPPA**

HB reported that she had made contact with the President of the BPPA, who was enthusiastic about exploring possible links between the BPPA and the BPA. HB had tentatively suggested that a workshop aimed at PGR students, focusing on getting a job in philosophy, and this had been warmly received; also that it was likely that funding from Birmingham would be forthcoming. She pointed out that there would need to be some involvement from members of the BPA committee in order for this event to be promoted as a BPA venture.

HB also raised the possibility of having a member of the Committee on the BPPA Advisory Board. It was agreed that she would see whether this involved travelling to annual meetings etc., and, if it did,

she would suggest to the BPPA that they could simply approach a member of the BPA committee for advice or support on particular issues as the need arose.

ACTION: HB

#### **(e) Metrics-based research assessment: HEFCE consultation**

The AHRC will very soon (mid-November) be launching a consultation on metrics-based research assessment. After some discussion, it was agreed that the Committee should investigate how much support there would be for abandoning the link between research 'quality' and funding levels, rather than going through the hugely time-consuming and expensive process that the RAE has become, and which any successor to the RAE will continue to be.

HB, BH and JW agreed to work out a strategy for replying to the consultation, with JW to work on an analysis of the financial effects of abandoning the current grading of units of assessment. This could be followed by a consultation with members and departments.

ACTION: HB, BH, JW

#### **(f) Administrative assistance**

HB reminded the committee that in principle, the University of Hertfordshire is funding a 10% position as membership secretary to assist DH in his role as Finance Officer, and the BPA is funding a further 10% position to cover additional administration, on the assumption that these two roles are filled by the same person. However since Sacha has resigned both positions, Hanne was being employed solely by the BPA (at 20%) while the re-hiring process at Hertfordshire ran its course. The position would be advertised internally and Hanne confirmed that she would be applying.

#### **(g) RAE panel: specialist advisors**

There had been some email discussion amongst the committee concerning the suggestion of the nomination of specialist advisors to the RAE sub-panel. The BPA had now responded to HEFCE in the light of that discussion.

#### **(h) Liability insurance**

HB reported that the Aristotelian Society were currently investigating taking out liability insurance, and that she had approached the same company as the Aristotelian Society and was waiting for a response. While the Mind Association had recently stopped getting liability insurance, it was agreed that the BPA should find out how much the insurance would cost and what it would cover before making a decision.

ACTION: HB

#### **(i) PRS Subject Centre Advisory Board**

The PRS Subject Centre had expressed a desire to have two BPA Executive Committee members on its Advisory Board. Previously HB had been a member, but since she no longer wanted to do it, Tom Sorell agreed to replace her. However it was agreed that the BPA could not currently provide two members, since this requires two day trips to Leeds each year and there are no committee members who live nearby. It was agreed that HB would explain this to the PRS, but that – if the PRS wanted this – if TS could not attend a PRS meeting for any reason he would try to find someone to go in his place.

ACTION: HB

### **5. Financial report**

HDJ provided a brief financial report. Since no effort had been made to chase up non-renewing members yet, no long-term trends or problems could be identified.

## **6. Publicity: website, logo etc.**

The redesign of and new hosting arrangements for the website had now been done, though HB reported that there was still a fair amount of work to do on both the content and organization of the website. The new logo had also been produced.

## **7. List of philosophers in the UK**

The Aristotelian Society had produced a list of philosophers in the UK (drawing on information available publicly on the web), which she had passed on to HB. Since the list contained some errors and omissions, HB encouraged everyone to check it and let her know of any updates. An amended list would then be sent back to the Aristotelian Society.

ACTION: ALL

## **8. Recruitment**

It was agreed that there was a need to recruit new members, and to improve the renewal rate amongst existing members. This was partly for financial reasons, but it was also agreed that as wide a membership as possible was independently desirable so that the BPA could represent as wide a constituency as possible. Various proposals were agreed:

- A recruitment drive would be launched once the website is ready. This might involve a hard copy of a new newsletter, plus a covering letter explaining why joining the BPA is a good idea. Precise wording and procedures to be worked out.
- Suggest to member departments that they link to the BPA website from their own home page.
- Encourage people to pay by standing order. HB suggested that those doing so could be protected from any rise in membership fees until, say, 2012, as an incentive. This was agreed.
- HDJ to compile a list of philosophers who are not members, so that they can be approached.
- HDJ to compile a list of how much the learned societies pay, with a view to simplifying the amount charged and possibly increasing the fees for some societies (e.g. those that make large profits from journal sales).

ACTION: HB, HDJ

## **9. Philosophy in new universities**

MA (Mark) reported on the difficulties faced by philosophers working in new universities, particularly where they are not part of a dedicated philosophy department and therefore lack visibility. He also stressed that (a) in general philosophy is not thriving in new universities (he pointed to the recent closure of Philosophy at Bolton) and (b) this raises a serious issue for the study of philosophy within the UK, namely that lack of philosophy provision in new universities effectively prevents the study of philosophy at HE level for those with lower A level grades. The Committee agreed that this was indeed a serious issue and BH stressed that the BPA should and would be sympathetic to any proposals for improving the situation.

MA suggested that the BPA website could have a page with a national register of those willing to act as external examiners, and this was agreed.

MA also pointed out that philosophy academics and research students at new universities generally had poor access to physical and electronic texts, and that formal agreements with libraries at old universities often did not permit full access and borrowing rights. JW pointed out that many old universities have visiting or honorary research fellowship schemes, which allowed library access, and that this could be one way to solve the problem. He also suggested that something similar might be possible through the Institute of Philosophy, and that this might be one way in which the Institute could

be seen to be serving the philosophical community nationally. JW agreed to discuss this with Tim Crane, and HB agreed to discuss the situation with the University of Birmingham library, to see whether more informal arrangements at a local level were possible.

ACTION: HB, JW

## **10. British Undergraduate Philosophy Society**

BH had made contact with the Chair of BUPS, and – as with the BPPA – it was agreed that BUPS was an excellent organization that deserves the support of the BPA. It was agreed that the BPA website should link to the BUPS website (and vice versa), and that it should be made clear to BUPS that they are welcome to approach the BPA committee for advice and support.

ACTION: BH

## **11. Philosophy in schools**

Since its foundation, the BPA has considered its relation to philosophy taught in secondary schools. BPA membership criteria were originally developed so as to include school teachers as possible members. The BPA has also informed itself about the quality of the syllabus and examining for A and AS level philosophy offered by the AQA board, and about philosophy content in the much more widely subscribed papers in Religious Studies. The BPA has helped the AQA to revise its syllabus, and has helped to bring BPA members in touch with recruiters of examiners at secondary school level. The BPA has also tried to raise issues of how philosophy might be taught at schools. A conference in 2006 was concerned with this, and, more recently, an advisory service for school teachers in most of the country has been set up.

The current goals of BPA schools activity are: to raise standards of teaching and examining, to provide assistance to school teachers throughout UK who may want to have access to university-level expertise, to increase membership by recruiting from school teachers of philosophy.

The current problems are 1) the BPA has insufficient knowledge of, and access to, the considerable body of philosophy school teachers. Use of mailshots and web-advertising through better connected bodies was not that effective, 2) partly on account of (1), the BPA advisory service is under-used, 3) it is desirable, but very time-consuming, to develop links with the whole range of examining bodies in Religious Studies, 4) it is desirable to look into the possible opportunity for philosophy in the huge area of citizenship studies.

TS suggested that the BPA's dealings with schools should be more effective, and that, in order to achieve that, BPA could join forces with those who are more closely connected with school teachers, such as Michael Lacewing and his (commercial) company "A-Level Philosophy".

A-level Philosophy has access to about 150 teachers and understands their desires, it is very connected to the A-level syllabus. At the moment, BPA has no real link with philosophy teachers, whereas it would like to have such a link. We can provide a service that teachers could find useful.

It was agreed that a collaboration between BPA and A-level Philosophy should be explored. This would entail not so much the training of teachers, but rather to help them to teach philosophy. How can we promote philosophy teaching standards in fruitful collaboration with teachers? All the while, the BPA needs to make sure to pursue its own mission. TS will make a proposal of how to approach this and then discuss again with the Committee. The aim is not only to recruit, but also to help teachers and to raise standards in schools. The option of podcasts was offered.

On a separate note it was put to the Committee that no list of teachers is available for open use (even though they do exist).

## **12. European Reference Index for the Humanities**

The BPA had received two requests in connection with the European Science Foundation's ERIH project: one from the BA, asking for our views in the light of its recent report, "Peer review: the challenge for the humanities and social sciences" (pp.34-7); the other from the Chair of the Council of University Classical Departments, who had exchanged letters with the AHRC concerning the principles behind the establishment of such an index (independently of the particular methodology used to construct it, and the uses to which it might be put).

It was noted that both the AHRC and the BA have concerns about the ERIH. However, the AHRC – as a member of the ESF – seems to be concerned only with specific problems with the list as it stands and the methodology used to construct it, the BA is taking a harder line, since it declares itself unconvinced about the 'conceptual foundations' of the ERIH (as is the CUCD). (For example, the ESF state that the classification is not designed to make judgements of quality, but this is contradicted by the description of the categories, which appeal to the 'reputation' of journals.)

It was agreed that, assuming the ERIH is put to some use or other in evaluating the quality of research published in journals, there are serious dangers to the proposed list – whatever methodology is used for its construction or however many current inconsistencies and inaccuracies are removed. In particular:

(i) 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.

(ii) The existence of the categories (currently A, B and C) would inevitably change submission patterns, with lower-ranked journals losing submissions and higher-ranked journals gaining submissions. This in turn could lead to the extinction of some journals and an unmanageable increase in submissions for others.

It was therefore agreed that it would be good to reiterate that BPA did not agree to it in principle with the ERIH, and that BH and HB would prepare responses to both requests.

ACTION: BH and HB

## **13. Government cut in funding for second degrees**

Several members had approached the BPA expressing concern about the Government's recent decision to stop funding qualifications where they were at an equal or lower level to what the student has already achieved. There is some evidence that Philosophy will be hit disproportionately hard by this decision, and that particular philosophy departments – specifically at the OU and Birkbeck – would be severely affected. (Some 40% of students taking the OU's main philosophy UG-level course already have a qualification at the same or a higher level, for example.)

It was agreed that BH and HB would prepare a response on behalf of the BPA, which is not in favour of the governments' decision. There were no more specifics given on this action – since time was running out, the specifics of this task were delegated to BH and HB.

ACTION: BH and HB

## **14. Membership of FISP**

DH reported that membership of FISP did not bring any noticeable benefit to the BPA, and that membership renewal is time-consuming. It was agreed that the BPA's membership would not be renewed.

**15. LSE/BA research study**

This item was not discussed due to lack of time, and will be revisited once the consultation is live.

**16. AOB**

The situation at the University of Aberdeen was discussed.

ACTION: BH