

BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
Executive Committee meeting

Wednesday 30 April 2008, 12pm
Seminar Room, 19 Gordon Square, London WC1E 6BT

APPROVED MINUTES

1. Apologies: MM McCabe, Alessandra Tanesini, Duncan Pritchard, Adrian Moore, Hanne De Jaegher.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and the March 2007 meeting: Approved.

3. Matters arising

AHRC Postgraduate Panel nomination: JW reported that his application to sit on this panel had been accepted.

British Library India & China Focus Group: JW reported that he had attended this meeting on behalf of the BPA, though it turned out to concern Asian Studies.

Liaison with BPPA: HB reported that she had conveyed the BPA Committee's willingness to advise and support the BPPA, and the BPA and BPPA now link their websites to each other. She also reported that the proposed 'employability workshop' was now going ahead at Birmingham at the end of May, with input from some BPA Committee members and some members of the Birmingham Philosophy Department, and substantial funding from the UoB Graduate School. She noted, however, that there were still some (very cheap) places available and urged other committee members to encourage suitable PG students to apply.

ACTION: ALL

Metrics-based research assessment: Hefce consultation on the Research Excellence Framework: The proposal to suggest that research assessment be abolished as a method for distribution of QR funding had fallen by the wayside, and a response to the Hefce, Hefcw and SFC consultations had been made (available on the BPA website) stressing various serious problems with assessment based on bibliometric tools.

Hefce's response to the consultation had been to decide to apply a combined metrics/light-touch peer review approach across all disciplines (not just non-STEM disciplines as had originally been proposed); JW reported that Hefce had also allowed that the balance between the two might differ in different kinds of discipline.

After some discussion, it was generally agreed that while it was a positive result that Hefce had decided against a pure metrics system of review, there were still very serious concerns about the viability and credibility of any bibliographic measure of research quality. (It was also pointed out that the current RAE peer review system itself is not an ideal method for measuring research quality.)

It was agreed to take no further action until Hefce had made more progress in investigating possible bibliometric measures, and made its deliberation public.

Administrative assistance: HB reported that Hanne was now paid as a 10% position by Hertfordshire as assistance for the Treasurer and 10% by the BPA. However the Hertfordshire position would end when DH stops being Treasurer (in July 08) and the BPA would then have to pay for the full 20% position.

RAE panel specialist advisors: HB reminded the Committee that Hefce had contacted them again with suggestions for more specialist advisors to the RAE panel, and that a response had been given.

Liability insurance: HB had not made much progress with this but in the light of a reasonable quote given by the insurers to the Aristotelian Society, she would begin to pursue this again.

ACTION: HB

PRS Subject Centre Advisory Board: The PRS has been advised that TS would replace HB on its Advisory Board.

Publicity, website, logo etc.: The new website was now live and fully functioning. HB reported that feedback on both the website and the new logo had been very positive.

Recruitment: HB reported that the recruitment drive had taken longer to organize than she had expected, but that all existing members had now been sent a letter inviting them to renew, along with the Feb 08 newsletter and up-to-date information about book and journal discounts. In addition, about 700 non-members in UK HE institutions had been identified, and all had been sent a letter along with the newsletter and a leaflet, 'Why join the BPA?'. All member departments and learned societies had also (very recently) been invited to renew their memberships.

HB reported that the constituencies that had not yet been approached were schools, schoolteachers, and PGR students. HDJ had recently discovered Sacha's database of schoolteachers, and HB would write to them in due course. HB and HDJ would liaise over how to reach schools and PGRs. (HDJ had not found any database of school members.)

ACTION: HB, HDJ

Philosophy in new universities: Mark A reported that the SCONUL agreement allowed borrowing rights and full on-site access to online resources at Senate House Library.

There was some discussion of the state of philosophy in new universities and how they might be assisted in improving access to library resources. JW suggested that it might be possible to enter into consortium agreements with journal publishers, as happens with some community colleges in the US and some universities in the developing world. It was also pointed out that the Institute of Philosophy, like the BPA, also had within its remit sustaining the health of philosophy in the UK, and that it was therefore reasonable to involve them in any discussion of how to assist philosophy staff and students in new universities. However it was agreed that before exploring solutions, it would be useful to discover the scope of the problem, and that the first stage was to collect basic information about which new universities offer philosophy provision at UG and PG level, what the level of library provision is, and how many students are affected. Mark A agreed to compile a provisional list based on UCAS codes, with all committee members providing any information they had, and when the relevant people at new universities had been identified, to ask them to complete a short questionnaire.

ACTION: MARK, ALL

British Undergraduate Philosophy Society: BH had made clear to BUPS that they are welcome to approach the BPA Committee for advice and support. HB reported that she had added a link to BUPS on the BPA website.

European Reference Index for the Humanities: HB confirmed that a response to the request from the BA for views on the ERIH had been submitted.

Government cut in funding for second degrees: HB reminded the Committee that she had made a submission on behalf of the BPA to the Government Inquiry expressing grave concerns about the decision to cut ELQ funding. The Inquiry had now issued its report, which was highly critical of the way in which the decision had been made.

LSE/BA research study: HB reminded the Committee that a submission had been made to this study, concerning the impact of research in humanities and social science disciplines.

4. Executive Committee membership

BH reminded the Committee that Dave Archard had resigned from the Committee for personal reasons. In addition, Dudley Knowles, Duncan Pritchard and Adrian Moore were coming to the end of their terms. DK had already served two terms and was therefore ineligible to stand again. DP had confirmed that he would not be standing again, but AM confirmed that he was happy to stand for election for a second term.

GF's period of co-option also comes to an end in July, as does DH's term as treasurer. DH will therefore no longer be a supernumerary member of the Committee from July. The Committee thanked DH for the hard work he had put in to the BPA over the years.

The Committee nominated Mark as DH's successor as Treasurer, to commence in July 08.

HB, JW and BH's terms all come to an end in 2009 and none are eligible for re-election; AT's term also ends.

5. Financial report

DH provided a brief financial and membership report for the preceding 6 months. Expenditure had been unusually high due to the costs of the website and logo design and the printing and postage for the recruitment drive. However these costs had been covered by Routledge's payment for advertising on the website.

Income from membership was also very low, but this was due to the fact that renewal letters had only recently gone out; also new and renewing members agreeing to pay by standing order were given free membership for 07-08.

There had so far been 48 members since the recruitment drive, with $\frac{3}{4}$ of them paying by standing order.

JW pointed out that he did not know whether he already paid by standing order. It was agreed that a reminder email should be sent out in due course to all members who had not renewed; this would confirm who was and was not already paying by SO.

ACTION: HDJ

6. Arts and Humanities Rapid Response Group

The suggestions for the AHRRG had come from the Chair of the Council of University Classics Departments, as a way of providing rapid, co-ordinated responses from A&H learned societies and subject associations to (e.g.) AHRC decisions. HB reported that the precise membership of

this group was not yet determined, but it was likely to comprise between 12 and 20 learned societies and subject associations. The Committee confirmed its desire to join this group.

7. European Reference Index for the Humanities

HB reminded the Committee that she had attended, along with about 20 representatives of other learned societies and subject associations in A&H, a meeting with representatives of the AHRC and the European Science Foundation, where there was a full and frank discussion of the learned societies' concerns. Unfortunately, no collective response to this meeting had been arrived at yet, the matter having been eclipsed by the AHRRG proposal.

It was agreed that it was important for the BPA to express its dissatisfaction with the ERIH to the AHRC, and that HB should draft a letter outlining our concerns to them. This would then be circulated to the other LS's/SA's who attended the meeting, and anyone who wanted to sign up to it could do so. (Or this could be done through AHRRG if it was sufficiently fully-formed.) However it was agreed that HB would wait until after tomorrow's AHRC meeting, in case any changes in its position were evident, given its appointment of a new Director of Research.

ACTION: HB

8. Recent AHRC changes and cuts

JW reminded the Committee of the current state of play with AHRC funding. While the AHRC had received an increase in funding in the 2007 spending review, the increased costs of fEC produced an overall shortfall. The AHRC had, as a result, cut the success rate for the Research Leave Scheme to around 15% (having been 50% until fairly recently) and had axed the September 08 round all together; HB reported that so far as she could tell, only two philosophers had been successful in the most recent round. The AHRC had said that they would restore funding to the RLS, but had not said to what level. In addition, the number of PG studentships for 08-09 had been cut from 1500 to 1000. This number was due to rise again in future years but not up to its current level.

There was some discussion of what the BPA's attitude should be towards directed funding, which the AHRC seems to be increasingly prioritizing. It was pointed out that sensitivity was needed to the interests of the increasing number of applied philosophers, who are generally less hostile to the kinds of priority area that the AHRC had identified.

It was agreed that, in principle, directed inter-council funding was appropriate, since the route for non-directed funding required that inter-council interdisciplinary proposals have to be approved by both funding councils, which is extremely difficult. Having directed funding streams for specific interdisciplinary themes would mean a single panel competent to judge specific interdisciplinary areas. However, directed funding within the sole remit of the AHRC produces an artificial barrier, since good projects should be able to be funded through open funding schemes anyway, and is therefore not desirable. It was stressed that hostility to the principle of directed intra-council funding streams needed to be distinguished clearly from hostility to the particular areas that had been identified by the AHRC.

It was agreed that BH, representing the BPA at tomorrow's meeting with the AHRC, should stress the fundamental importance of restoring PG and RLS funding to their former levels, and the importance of not channeling increasing levels of funding towards intra-council directed funding streams.

ACTION: BH

9. Philosophy in schools

TS outlined proposals for closer collaboration with A Level Philosophy, a commercial organization aimed at providing resources for teachers of philosophy in schools, in the form of a joint website, hosting a helpline/blog, a range of audio and visual material, etc. It was agreed that TS should continue to pursue these proposals, with an eye to ensuring that the BPA did not agree to anything that was overly burdensome, but with the aim of building links with schools and schoolteachers and providing genuine benefits to them.

10. Philosophy at Aberdeen

The situation at Aberdeen, with a rapidly declining number of permanent staff, was noted and discussed. It was agreed that BH would write to the VC, offering assistance in the current appointment process.

ACTION: BH

11. AOB: There was no other business to discuss.