



British Philosophical Association

# **Newsletter 2009**

[www.bpa.ac.uk](http://www.bpa.ac.uk)

## **BPA Newsletter: May 2009**

### *Editor:*

Helen Beebee, Director, BPA, Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2TT (h.beebee@bham.ac.uk)

### *BPA Officers:*

President:	Brad Hooker (Reading)
Director:	Helen Beebee (Birmingham)
Treasurer:	Mark Addis (Birmingham City)
Executive Secretary:	James Holden (Birmingham)

### *Executive Committee:*

Mark Addis (Birmingham City)  
Maria Alvarez (Southampton)  
Helen Beebee (Birmingham)  
Michael Brady (Glasgow)  
Jeremy Butterfield (Cambridge)  
Gordon Finlayson (Sussex)  
Brad Hooker (Reading)  
M.M. McCabe (King's College London)  
Adrian Moore (Oxford)  
Pauline Phemister (Edinburgh)  
Tom Sorell (Birmingham)  
Alessandra Tanesini (Cardiff)  
Jo Wolff (UCL)

Dear BPA member,

The British Philosophical Association was created in order to promote philosophy and more specifically to respond on behalf of the British philosophical community to proposals by governmental bodies concerning research and education. The need for a coordinated response to such proposals has been even greater than expected. Research and teaching in Britain is to a large degree shaped by RAE (now REF) incentives, AHRC arrangements, and Hefce initiatives. Curriculum developments in A-level philosophy are also important, both in themselves and in shaping the students who then study philosophy at university. Proposals for change arrive constantly, and many are poorly thought through. The BPA consults and lobbies to ensure that any changes will be beneficial.

Yours,

Brad Hooker, President of the BPA

### **Contents**

1. BPA activities 2008-9	4
2. AHRC news	5
3. RAE results and Government funding	8
4. Philpapers.org	8
5. Philosophy in schools	8
6. Services for members	9
7. BPA Executive Committee elections	10
8. AGM: UEA, July 2008	10
9. Join the BPA!	10

## 1. BPA activities 2008-9

The BPA Executive Committee has been active on various fronts during 2008-9. More information on some of its activities is provided in the news items below, but here is a short summary. The various letters, proposals and consultation responses are all available on our website.

**AHRC Fellowships Scheme:** Several Executive Committee members attended AHRC consultation workshops on the successor to the Research Leave Scheme. The new Fellowships Scheme closely resembles the proposal that the BPA contributed to the consultation.

**European Reference Index for the Humanities:** The BPA was represented at a bad-tempered meeting between subject associations, learned societies and the AHRC in February 2008. As a result, we wrote to Philip Esler, Chief Executive of the AHRC. You can read our letter and his response in the news section of our website (July 2008 archives). We also signed a letter sent by the newly-formed 'Arts and Humanities User Group' (A-HUG).

**New website for schoolteachers of philosophy:** Our Schools Liaison Officer, Tom Sorell, has been developing a website aimed at schoolteachers of philosophy.

**Reinstatement of the Philosophy PGCE:** We recently wrote to the Minister for Children, Schools and Families, asking him to consider reinstating the Philosophy PGCE in the light of the huge increase in the number of children taking Philosophy A Level in schools (the number more than doubled, to around 3500, between 2002 and 2007).

**Threatened closure of Liverpool department:** Many of you know that Philosophy was one of several Liverpool departments earmarked for possible closure earlier this year. The BPA wrote to the Vice Chancellor and also co-ordinated a letter from all the heads of Russell Group philosophy departments. These supplemented the very many letters and emails that were sent from individuals across the country, both to the Liverpool VC and to members of parliament, and a vigorous campaign by the Department's own students. We are all now waiting for the University's final decision.

**Employability workshop for PhD students:** In May 2008, several members of the Executive Committee participated in a workshop, co-sponsored by the BPA, the BPPA and the University of Birmingham Graduate School, aimed at PhD students in Philosophy aspiring to an academic career.

**Women in Philosophy survey:** We recently sent a survey out to Heads of Department asking for information about the gender balance of undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff. We will be analyzing the data and considering how to react to it, in collaboration with the Society for Women in Philosophy, later in the year.

**New Universities Survey:** We also surveyed new universities where philosophy is taught, in order to gain a better understanding of the scale of philosophy provision in new universities, who is involved, and what their particular problems and needs are.

## 2. AHRC news

### ***New Fellowships Scheme***

The AHRC has replaced its popular Research Leave Scheme with a new Fellowships scheme, with an initial annual allocation of £8m. We believe the Fellowships scheme is a significant improvement on its predecessor; indeed it incorporates the major elements of the BPA's own proposal submitted to the AHRC as part of the consultation process. These include:

- Flexibility: the new scheme allows staff to apply for less than a 100% buy-out, allowing them to hold a Fellowship while continuing with other work (e.g. an existing buy-out attached to a different research project, or administrative or teaching responsibilities that cannot be taken on by other existing or replacement staff). The length of the award can also vary, from 3 to 9 months; the maximum AHRC contribution is £96k.
- Decoupling from institutional research leave.
- Early career route: the AHRC aims to have a higher success rate for this route, thus allowing improved access to AHRC research leave for early career researchers.

As with other AHRC schemes, there are no application deadlines. Applications can be submitted at any time from 1 September 2009.

We'll keep a close eye on how the scheme develops. One issue will be whether the flexibility results in more successful applications overall, or whether the much larger maximum award will lead to relatively few awards, given to senior researchers for longer projects, being made. In principle, the total number of awards could vary from about eighty to several hundred annually.

### ***Block Grant Partnerships***

From this year, around 80% of AHRC postgraduate funding is being allocated by HEIs themselves. The remaining 20% will be awarded to individuals, as with the old system, and will be restricted to those institutions (rather than individual departments or subject areas) that did not make a successful application for a BGP award (e.g. Hertfordshire, Oxford Brookes). In most or all cases, this will be because the institution was not eligible to apply for BGP awards due to having had too few AHRC studentships in previous years.

Nationally, the number of BGP awards earmarked for Philosophy between 2009 and 2013 is 255 Doctoral and 161 Masters awards. This is the third-largest number amongst the AHRC's subject areas, behind History (549 Doctoral and 279 Masters) and English (521 Doctoral and 288 Masters).

This gives an annual average of 51 Doctoral and 32 Masters awards, so 83 in total (not including any that are awarded in the open competition). This compares with:

2008:	38 Doctoral	27 Masters	Total 65
2007:	70 Doctoral	36 Masters	Total 106
2006:	41 Doctoral	56 Masters	Total 97
2005:	54 doctoral	64 Masters	Total 118

You may recall that the AHRC cut postgraduate funding by about 20% in 2008. This seems to have hit Philosophy disproportionately hard in 2008, but numbers have recovered in the BGP period.

In brute funding terms, counting a Doctoral award as worth three times as much as a Masters award, the BGP annual average for 2009-13 is 85% of the average for 2005-7, which is slightly better than one would expect. The annual number of Doctoral awards is 92% of the 2005-7 average, with Masters awards at 62%.

Later in the year, we will be asking departments for their views about how the first round of BGP awards has gone, to see whether there is anything we can do to make the process run more smoothly (if necessary) in later years. If you are involved in postgraduate admissions, do please let us know if you have had problems with the new system.

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

As you may know, the ERIH is a project run by the European Science Foundation (of which the AHRC is a member organisation). The upshot is a ranking of journals in Humanities subject areas, including Philosophy.

The BPA and a large group of other subject associations and learned societies have been involved in a long-running argument with the AHRC about the ERIH. To name a few of the problems: (a) the methodology (and consequently some of the results) is highly dubious; (b) there is systematic fudging by the ESF as to whether the rankings are supposed to reflect the quality of articles published in the journals; and (c) the rankings can be put to all sorts of inappropriate uses outside the ESF's control. For example we have heard anecdotal reports that the ERIH has been used as a basis for judging the quality of publications for tenure candidates in the USA.

The AHRC have delivered assurances that they will not use the ERIH rankings at a sub-national level (that is, for any purpose other than for general reporting to DIUS on the quality or international standing of A&H research in the UK generally). While that may minimize some of the possible negative effects of the ERIH, we do not believe that such an ill-conceived and methodologically flawed ranking – which can be used inappropriately, however strongly the AHRC recommends that it is not – should be funded or endorsed by the AHRC.

Both the ESF and the AHRC have gone very quiet on the ERIH in the last few months. In particular, the ESF website says that the panels responsible for producing the rankings 'will' be reconstituted in late 2008/early 2009, but there is no evidence that this has actually gone ahead; nor does there appear to have been any progress on the plan to extend the ERIH to cover edited collections and monographs. We are hoping that this is an indication that the whole project has ground to a halt. If activity recommences, we shall of course resume our campaign.

### ***Collaborative research funding***

The AHRC is unshakably committed to collaborative grants as one of its core activities. In recent years, several collaborative grants have been awarded to

philosophers, for example 'Intuitions and Philosophical Methodology' (St. Andrews), 'Metaphysics of Science' (Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham) and 'Partiality and Impartiality in Ethics' (Reading).

We suspect that philosophers could secure more funding through this route than they currently do. The AHRC interprets the term 'collaborative research' as meaning research on the same question(s) by more than one person; there is no requirement that at least some of the resulting publications be co-authored. Hence, a considerable percentage of the research that philosophers in the UK want to do could be eligible for collaborative grants if the applications frame the questions to be addressed fairly widely. For example, if one colleague wants to develop a monistic theory about *x* and another wants to work on dualism about *x*, they could put in a collaborative application for work on the battle between monism and dualism about *x*. This application could propose research leave for these two colleagues plus funding for a studentship, a post-doctoral fellowship, and a conference or two.

### ***The impact of research***

We share the concerns of many philosophers in the UK about the AHRC's (in line with the other research councils') focus on 'impact' and 'knowledge transfer'. Indeed, AHRC funding applications must now include an 'impact summary and plan'.

The effects of all this on the success of a lot of funding applications from philosophers is hard to predict. Some will think that failing to produce concrete elements of 'impact' cannot but harm one's chances, for example in marginal decisions between two otherwise equally-strong applications. On the other hand, the AHRC has been developing a very permissive conception of 'impact' (so that it includes, for example, transmission of research findings through research-led teaching), and has stated publicly that 'excellent research without obvious or immediate impact will continue to be funded by the AHRC and will not be disadvantaged as a result of the introduction of these new sections in the application forms' ([ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/ImpactFAQ.pdf](http://ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Documents/ImpactFAQ.pdf)).

Whatever the practical effects of the new impact summaries, we take the view that even the AHRC's permissive conception of 'impact' focuses too heavily on results. After all, the value of research-led teaching, philosophical discussions on Radio 4, popular philosophy books and so on is not that they present research findings to their audience; rather, their primary value lies in the fact that they equip and encourage their audience to think philosophically about the issues for themselves. This being so, the major cultural benefits that philosophical research brings are real but highly general, and so they cannot be easily captured by any description of how the specific results of particular projects are disseminated to students or to the wider society. This is a point we have made to the AHRC in our response to its recent 'Future Directions' consultation.

The AHRC's 'Impact Task Force' will soon be producing its final report, and we will of course be keeping a close eye on developments.

### **3. RAE results and Hefce funding**

One notable fact emerging from the RAE is that there was a 39% increase in the number of staff submitted to the Philosophy sub-panel – a total of 457. The total Hefce QR funding for Philosophy in 2009-10 will be £9 million (according to a *Guardian* article in March), an increase of 4.3% on 2008-9.

Thus the average funding per member of staff submitted to the RAE is considerably reduced – around 75% of what it was in 2008-9.

What this means in practice will of course vary enormously from department to department. Departments who submitted similar numbers of staff and performed similarly in RAE2008 compared to RAE2001 will be much worse off. On the other hand, clearly many departments submitted more staff in RAE2008 (Oxford alone submitted 30 more staff than in 2001), and so (if they performed similarly) many will not be worse off; and of course some of them will be better off. Moreover, since the funding is given to universities rather than individual departments, and universities are free to distribute the money as they see fit, funding differences for individual departments (whether good or bad) may not filter down to departmental level.

Overall, however, the 4.3% overall increase in funding is to be welcomed, given the economic climate and the low rate of inflation. The figure is considerably worse than some science disciplines, but it is also considerably better than some Arts & Humanities disciplines.

### **4. Philpapers.org**

David Chalmers and David Bourget at ANU have launched a database of published work in philosophy, [www.philpapers.org](http://www.philpapers.org). This is set to become a fantastic resource for philosophers. It has links to publications, is fully searchable, and allows users to upload and categorise publications themselves. It is free to use, although for most journal articles you will only be able to access them if your institution subscribes to the journal and you're on campus or are using your institution's proxy server.

The project has been awarded a £200,000 grant by the Joint Information Systems Committee in the UK. This will be administered by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of London, where David Bourget will be based for the next three years.

### **5. Philosophy in schools**

The BPA has worked since its inception to support philosophy in schools and FE colleges. Our Executive Committee has a dedicated Schools Liaison Officer, Tom Sorell, who has been involved in discussions with the AQA, and, more recently, OCR and Edexcel, to establish channels of advice to Examining Boards at A, A-S and GCSE level in both Philosophy and Religious Studies.

Our most recent initiative is an online answers service for schoolteachers with questions about syllabus-related philosophy. We hope the BPA 'philosophical answers' website will be operating by September. The answers will be supplied by an existing panel of university-level teachers of philosophy. The BPA will ask its colleagues in the Examination Boards to publicize this service to its clients. The purpose of the service is to give certifiably reliable information to teachers about the philosophers and philosophical topics that they cover. Eventually the schools area of the BPA website will act as a gateway to internet and print sources for philosophy that the BPA recommends as accurate and accessible.

Alongside these initiatives, the BPA continues to engage in discussions with Exam Boards about modernisation of schools teaching material and about syllabus and exam matters.

If you are a schoolteacher of philosophy, you might like to visit the 'Philosophy in schools' section of our website, at [www.bpa.ac.uk/resources/schools](http://www.bpa.ac.uk/resources/schools), which includes a list of philosophers who are happy to be contacted for advice or support, together with other information and links, which we hope you find useful.

We would like to be able to engage more with schoolteachers, representing their views where possible and providing any other services that they would like us to provide. However, in order to do this effectively, we need you to get involved. Teachers of philosophy in schools are eligible for full membership of the BPA, and schools and FE colleges that teach philosophy are eligible for institutional membership.

If you are a member of the BPA and would like to get involved, please get in touch with Tom Sorell on [t.sorell@bham.ac.uk](mailto:t.sorell@bham.ac.uk).

## **6. Services for members**

### ***External examiners listing***

Many departments find it difficult to find new external examiners for their undergraduate degree programmes. On the other hand, some philosophers out there never get asked, and would be only too happy to oblige. We'd like to act as matchmaker, by keeping a list on the website of those willing and able to act as external examiners. If you'd like to be on the list, please let HB know, giving your name, position and email address, and the URL of your webpage.

### ***Book and journal discounts***

Individual BPA members can take advantage of many discounts on books and journals. For example there is a significant discount for BPA members on *Mind*, plus a standard 20% discount on OUP and Routledge philosophy books. BPA members also get free delivery on all Routledge philosophy books if they order using the BPA members' code. (Please note, some discounts only apply to UK residents.) For more information, go to [www.bpa.ac.uk/join\\_the\\_bpa](http://www.bpa.ac.uk/join_the_bpa).

### ***Departments under threat***

We see it as a core part of our mission to assist philosophy departments (and other units providing teaching and research in philosophy) that are threatened with closure or the winding-up of degree programmes. Please let us know if your department or degree programme is under threat, and we will help you in any way we can.

## **7. Executive Committee elections**

The members elected to the BPA Executive Committee in 2008, to serve a three-year term, were: Gordon Finlayson (Sussex), Michael Brady (Glasgow) and Jeremy Butterfield (Cambridge). Adrian Moore (Oxford) was re-elected for a second term.

Five members of the Committee come to the end of their terms in July 2009: Helen Beebee, Brad Hooker, Pauline Phemister, Alessandra Tanesini, and Jo Wolff. Elections for the vacant posts will be conducted in May/June, with the results announced at the AGM. All individual and institutional members are eligible to nominate candidates and to vote.

We also have a new Executive Secretary: James Holden, a PhD student at Birmingham. You can contact James about membership, book and journal discounts, etc. at [admin@bpa.ac.uk](mailto:admin@bpa.ac.uk).

## **7. AGM: University of East Anglia, July 2009**

Our Annual General Meeting for 2009 will take place at lunchtime on Sunday 12 July during the Joint Session at UEA.

We hope to include a brief panel discussion on the Research Excellence Framework (the successor to the RAE) with Antony Duff, chair of the Philosophy sub-panel in RAE2008.

## **8. Join the BPA!**

Individuals can now join online by filling in a simple form on our website, and then sending a cheque (£15 waged, £8 unwaged) or setting up a standing order. (Please make the date of the standing order 30 September.)

Learned societies can now also pay by standing order. Membership forms for learned societies, philosophy departments and equivalent units, and schools are available from our website.

New and renewing individual members will be sent information about how to claim book and journal discounts from publishers.

**[www.bpa.ac.uk/join\\_the\\_bpa](http://www.bpa.ac.uk/join_the_bpa)**