



British Philosophical Association

Newsletter 2008

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www.bpa.ac.uk

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Editor:

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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 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

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1. AHRC news

The AHRC has recently announced some radical changes to the way it distributes its money:

Strategic priorities:

While the AHRC says that it will continue to fund what it calls 'curiosity-driven research' – that is, research that is funded by responsive-mode schemes – it is clear that it is planning to use an increasing proportion of its money on its 'strategic priorities'. In its *Delivery Plan 2008-11*, it lists those priorities as: Stimulating Innovation in the Knowledge Economy; Global Threats to Security; and Capitalising on our Cultural Assets, along with two cross-Council priorities: Living with Environmental Change and Ageing: Lifelong Health and Wellbeing.

The Delivery Plan also states that it intends to earmark 50% of its postgraduate funding, via the Block Grant Partnerships (about which more below), for these strategic themes (although it is unclear how this is possible, given that under the BGP proposals, the AHRC will be allocating awards on a departmental basis and so will not have any influence over students' research topics).

Research Leave Scheme:

Following cuts in its funding last year, the success rate for the Research Leave Scheme is now around 15%, down from something like 40-50% in previous years. The AHRC also recently cancelled the September 2008 round of the Research Leave Scheme at short notice.

Block Grant Partnerships:

From 2009, around 80% of AHRC postgraduate funding will be allocated by HEIs themselves, with the bids for funding for a 5-year period to be submitted by September 2008. In addition:

Caps: Last summer, the AHRC said that there would be a cap on bids for block grants. The cap was said to be either 5 or 10 studentships per year more than the university's 5-yr average, depending on the size of that average. It now appears that caps on the number of studentships in

block-grant bids have been eliminated. Hence, virtually every university will presumably inflate the number of studentships for which it bids.

Reduction in numbers: The AHRC will be reducing the number of studentships allocated in 2008 from 1500 to 1000, and fixing the number of studentships allocated in 2009 and 2010 at 1325 in each year. Thus, the number of studentships in Arts and Humanities from the AHRC will be 3650 over the next three years instead of the 4500 there have been over the previous three years.

We are extremely concerned about the possible effects of these changes, as are many other national subject associations for arts and humanities disciplines. We are considering how to respond to the situation, in collaboration with other subject associations, and will keep you posted.

2. BPA responses to consultations

We have responded to various consultations and other requests on behalf of our members in recent months:

- Hefce consultation on the assessment and funding of higher education research post-2008 (the 'Research Excellence Framework');
- Government inquiry into the phasing out of funding for Equivalent or Lower Qualifications;
- Survey into the impact of Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, organized by the Public Policy Group at LSE in collaboration with the British Academy;
- British Academy request for views about the European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) and the Research Excellence Framework;
- During the autumn of 2006, and the winter and spring of 2007, the BPA consulted with the AHRC repeatedly concerning the AHRC's new scheme of Block Grants for Studentships (reported on to BPA members via email in August 2007).

You can read our submissions at our website, www.bpa.ac.uk/news.

We're also meeting with representatives of the AHRC and other Arts & Humanities subject associations in February to discuss the ERIH.

3. New website launched: www.bpa.ac.uk

We are pleased to announce the launch of our new website, at the new address of www.bpa.ac.uk. We hope you like it! Thanks to Zeynep Ozkan of pret-à-cliquer (www.pretacliquer.com) for the design, and also to Robin Cameron for maintaining the previous site for several years.

The website contains a lot of information that we hope you will find useful. This includes not only BPA-related information, like minutes of meetings and submissions we have made to various bodies; there are also announcements about current consultations; information about careers for philosophy graduates, Masters programmes in the UK, postgraduate and research funding, and philosophy in schools; links to member departments, learned societies and other philosophy-relevant websites; and much else besides.

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 Helen know, giving your name, position and email address, and the URL of your webpage.

Conference listing:

We have a (fairly minimalist, and currently underpopulated) conference page on the website. If you would like it to link to your conference, please email Helen the following information:

- Title, date and location of conference;
- The URL of the conference website;
- The deadline for the call for papers, if applicable.

4. Philosophy in schools

The BPA is very keen to increase its level of activity in relation to teachers of 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 other organisations concerning the curriculum for A- and AS-level Philosophy and GCSE, AS and A level Religious Studies. Through some of the AQA briefings to teachers on new syllabuses, BPA representatives are making contact with teachers of philosophy in increasingly large numbers. We also ran a successful conference for school teachers in 2006, with talks from Simon Blackburn, Brad Hooker and Anthony O'Hear. In the future, we hope to make available teaching materials, perhaps in downloadable versions, for teachers.

If you are a school teacher of Philosophy, you might like to visit the 'Philosophy in schools' section of our website, at 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 school teachers, 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. Information on how to join can be found at:

www.bpa.ac.uk/join_the_bpa

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.

5. Employability guide for Philosophy students

The Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies has produced a very nice 'employability guide' for Philosophy undergraduates. You can download it as a pdf from www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/emp_guides.html. Alternatively, if you would like hard copies (with a glossy cover) to distribute to your students, email them at: enquiries@prs.heacademy.ac.uk.

6. Book and journal discounts for BPA members

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. For more information, go to www.bpa.ac.uk/join_the_bpa.

Special offer from OUP!

OUP are delighted to offer members of the British Philosophical Association a special 30% discount on all OUP philosophy books. Visit www.oup.com/uk/sale/bpapromotion to claim this exclusive offer. This offer is only available online and the discount will revert to 20% on 1 June 2008.

7. Executive Committee membership

The members elected to the BPA Executive Committee in 2007, to serve a three-year term, were: Mark Addis (BCU), Maria Alvarez (Southampton), and Pauline Phemister (Edinburgh). M.M. McCabe (KCL) was re-elected to serve a second term. John Dupré and Stephen Clark stood down, and we would like to thank them for their service. Tom Sorell also came to the end of his term, but has been co-opted to the Committee to continue his work as our Schools Liaison Officer.

We also have a new Executive Secretary: Dr Hanne De Jaegher. You can contact Hanne about membership, book and journal discounts, etc. at admin@bpa.ac.uk.

8. AGM: Aberdeen, July 2008

Our Annual General Meeting for 07-08 will take place during the Joint Session at Aberdeen, 11-14 July.