

BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
Executive Committee meeting

Thursday 29 October 2009, 2pm
G35, Senate House, Malet St, London

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present: Helen Beebee, Mark Addis, Tom Sorell, Michael Brady, Adrian Moore, Jeremy Butterfield, Alessandra Tanesini, Gordon Finlayson, David Bain, Chris Hookway

1. Apologies: Maria Alvarez, M. M. McCabe, Gillian Howie

2. Minutes of the last meeting: Approved

3. Matters arising

Item 3, PGCE in Philosophy: The Minister for Children, Schools and Families had agreed to a meeting, but this had been postponed until December 2009; MM and TS to attend.

Item 3, BPA teaching award: Some correspondence had occurred between TS and the PRS on this issue but the issue had not progressed since then; Mark A to take up the issue again (see item 7).

Item 3, AHRC BGP co-ordination: HB reported that this item may be rendered redundant by changes to the BGP. It was also reported that the standard of applications for the open competition studentships had not been very high; it was agreed that Committee members should, where possible, make philosophers working in institutions with no BGP award aware of the good chances of success in 09-10 for high-quality applications.

ACTION: ALL

Item 3, AQA Advisory Committee: TS reported that this had now been disbanded.

Item 5, Treasurer's report: Mark A reported that renewals and new membership applications were healthy, with £3.5k coming in during September in renewals.

Item 6(iii) Representation of temporary staff: Maria A was unable to attend the Joint Session and so the proposed meeting with temporary staff had been cancelled. It was agreed that this should be rescheduled for the next Joint Session, and advertised in advance. Also Maria A to discuss with Dawn Philips.

ACTION: Maria A

Item 7, Recruitment & membership: Free membership of the IP for full individual BPA members had now been agreed by the IP management committee. This is now advertised on the BPA website; HB to remind the IP that it should be on the IP website too.

ACTION: HB

Item 7, Postgraduates: BPPA members are now entitled to free associate membership of the BPA; this offer is now advertised on the BPPA website.

Item 8, Philosophy in schools: TS reported that the prospects for a more fruitful future relationship with the AQA were good. He had had meetings with the AQA and EdExcel, both of whom remained enthusiastic about the 'Philosophical Answers' site, and would soon be meeting with OCR. TS also reported that the Philosophical Answers site was nearly ready to go live, and that someone had been hired (up to a maximum of 4 hours a week) to maintain the site and manage the panel of philosophers answering the questions. The RIP declined to sponsor this post, but did express some enthusiasm for possible future collaboration. Mark A and HB had agreed that this could be funded from BPA resources for the first year; the situation would be revisited once the site is up and running and the extent of the workload involved is known. Mark A noted that he is now getting both the Phil Answers website manager and the BPA Executive Secretary to fill in monthly timesheets.

TS reminded the Committee that the intention was to expand the Phil Answers site in due course, first to include links to reputable resources and eventually to include downloadable material. The Committee agreed that this fitted well with the 'impact' agenda (see item 9 below), and that HB should approach Barry Smith with a view to discussing a possible role for the IP, perhaps in connection with the 'Philosophy Bites' podcasts.

ACTION: HB

Item 9, Liverpool: HB reminded the Committee that the Department was no longer being threatened with closure.

Item 11: Philosophy in new universities: Progress on both a web list of philosophers in non-philosophy departments and journal consortia had been slow. HB to approach Jo Wolff re journal consortia, and to get Nigel onto the web list issue once work associated with membership renewals had died down.

After some discussion, anecdotal evidence emerged of problems in new universities, particularly with undergraduate philosophy programmes. The Committee confirmed its commitment to the view that new universities play an indispensable role in bringing undergraduate education in philosophy to sections of the population that are not well-represented in philosophy departments in old universities (most obviously students with weaker A level grades, but also ethnic minority students and mature students). The question of whether the management of new universities might consider that philosophy was not really an appropriate subject to be studied in the post-1992 sector was considered. HB and Mark A to consult on how the BPA might attempt to get the message across that new universities' role is both noticed and valued by the wider philosophical community.

ACTION: HB, Mark A

Item 12, AHRC 'Future Directions' consultation: The BPA had responded to this consultation (response available on the website). In addition, HB had written to Shearer West concerning the descriptions of the four 'core areas' of the AHRC contained in the consultation document. The AHRC had noted the BPA's concerns; whether and how the relevant core area would be redefined was unclear until further relevant documentation emerged from the AHRC.

On impact and KT, HB agreed to try and get information from successful AHRC applicants on (a) whether they had submitted an 'impact statement', and (b) what they had said, with a view to publishing some guidance and/or successful examples on the website.

ACTION: HB

On 'strategic themes', members had made some useful suggestions, several of which were passed on to the AHRC in the consultation response. A version of one of these ('The Art of Science') was now being taken forward by the AHRC, and HB noted that other themes being taken forward was also amenable to philosophical applications ('Translating Cultures' and 'Care for the Future'); however given the current funding climate it was unclear when any funding would be attached to these themes.

4. Director's report

HB noted that David Evans had died recently. David had been a wonderful servant of British philosophy, having served on the NCP for 11 years (four as President) and was one of the first members of the BPA Executive Committee. A link had been put on the website to the obituary written by Jonathan Gorman.

5. Committee members and officers 09-10

The newly-elected members of the Committee were Alessandra Tanesini (re-elected), Tom Sorell (previously co-opted), David Bain, Gillian Howie and Chris Hookway. (There were five positions because of the resignation of Pauline Phemister.)

M. M. McCabe had been confirmed as the new President, and HB had been confirmed as a supernumerary member, by the new Committee by email.

6. Women in Philosophy

HB presented the data gathered so far, covering more than half of the philosophers and students in the UK, which showed a drop in the proportion of women from 47% at undergraduate level to 21% of permanent staff. The Committee agreed to set up a committee to consider ways in which this situation might be addressed. HB asked interested Executive Committee members to volunteer by email; it was agreed that Jenny Saul, Director of SWIP, would also be asked to join the committee.

Mark A noted that there was also a problem with the under-representation of ethnic minorities in philosophy. All agreed that this was indeed an issue, but, as AT pointed out, the causes and possible solutions were likely to be very different and less amenable to influence by the philosophical community, given that the under-representation of ethnic minorities is evident at all levels and not just postgraduate and above.

ACTION: HB, ALL

7. PRS Subject Centre

Clare Saunders of the PRS had prepared a brief document for comment, which outlined PRS activities and issues.

The Committee noted that current and proposed PRS activities are well aligned with the BPA's concerns, with the planned seminar series with PESGB tying in with the impact agenda, the 'Beyond Boundaries' project tying in with our ongoing aim of locating and improving the visibility

of philosophers working in non-traditional settings, and the 'student transition' activities tying in with the BPA's school-teaching agenda.

TS was keen to step down as the BPA's representative on the PRS Advisory Board due to other commitments, and Mark A agreed to replace him. The Committee agreed that Mark should discuss specific ways in which the BPA might be involved in PRS activities with Clare.

ACTION: Mark A

8. BIS review of UK postgraduate provision

HB noted that the upcoming BIS review had not been well-advertised. It was agreed that some sort of submission would be a good idea, but that HB should check with the AHRC whether and how they will be responding first. (In the first instance, interested parties are being asked to submit their 'perspectives on the key areas of postgraduate provision that should be considered by the review', with a deadline of 18 December.)

ACTION: HB

9. Results of impact meeting

The Committee agreed that the impact meeting held in the morning, with around 30 participants, was a huge success, and that a clear consensus had emerged about the kind of view the BPA should take. Roughly, the consensus was that philosophy does have an impact on wider society (given a sufficiently broad definition of 'impact'), and that it is appropriate that, as a discipline, we should seek to articulate what this impact amounts to if our activities are to be subsidized by the general public.

HB to circulate to all participants some notes of the meeting and a draft BPA position paper. HB noted that there were still many issues to resolve in connection with the REF consultation, given that not much attention had been given in the morning meeting to whether and how the kinds of impact that philosophy has can be measured within the constraints of the REF; she would be seeking the advice of the Committee on these issue when compiling the REF consultation response.

ACTION: HB

10. REF consultation response

The Committee discussed some of the consultation questions. It was agreed that the response should include (amongst others to be determined) the following points:

- **Double-weighting of some outputs** is fine. However we would like to change two aspects of the treatment of double- (or more) weighted outputs in RAE2008:

The sub-panel (i) decided which outputs would be double-weighted. In addition, (ii) outputs were counted the same whether some of a particular person's outputs were double-weighted or not (so e.g. someone who submitted two books, which were double-weighted by the sub-panel, and 2 journal articles in effect had 6, rather than 4, 'outputs', so made 50% more of a contribution to the overall score than staff with just 4 'outputs' (e.g. 4 articles) did. Thus UoAs in effect did not know what their submission to the sub-

panel was, or how much each individual staff member was contributing to the overall score.

We should propose that (a) there is a mechanism that ensures that UoAs know exactly what items will be double-weighted, and (b) each individual member of (full-time) staff's submission should count equally (including ECRs). In particular, no staff should submit outputs that sum to more than 4 when double-weighting is taken into account.

One way to do this would be, first, to provide concrete (and inevitably quite formulaic) guidelines as to what kinds of output can be double-counted, and, second, allow UoAs themselves to designate particular outputs meeting the guidelines as double-weighted (or not). This means that someone with, say, one book and 3 journal articles will have to decide whether to submit and double-weight the book, and thus submit only 2 journal articles, or whether to single-count the book and submit all 4 items.

Such guidelines should make it clear that double-weighting depends on the amount of research involved rather than quality; if the panel's view is that an item double-weighted by the submitting UoA fails to demonstrate the required amount of research, they can take this into account when grading the item. (UoAs assumed that this kind of decision happened in RAE2008 in any case; e.g. very short outputs tended not to be submitted, on the grounds that their lack of scope would count against them, even if they were of very high quality – though of course this assumption may not have been correct.)

- **3 vs. 4 outputs per FTE:** 3 agreed. This significantly reduces the assessment burden, and means that the overall rate of publication required of staff over the assessment period is roughly the same as for RAE2008.
- **Use of different panels to assess outputs:** More clarity is needed (compared to RAE2008) on what happens to outputs submitted to one panel that fall more naturally within the competence of a different panel. (NB in the case of Philosophy, a combined panel with Theology would not reduce this at all.) Our understanding is that the output in question was simply sent to and graded by another panel. However some institutions seemed to be unaware of this, and put pressure on staff to align their research more closely with the discipline of the UoA they would be submitting with. (E.g. a philosopher employed by and submitted with a politics department might have some outputs that are not on political philosophy; if this does not count against them, which it should not, this needs to be clear to their institution when making REF preparations.)
- We welcome HEFCE's decision not to make use of **citation data** when assessing outputs for arts and humanities disciplines.
- **Users on panels:** There are major problems with having user members, particularly if the users are fixed in advance. The 'users' of philosophical research are very diverse. We suggest instead that users are involved, where appropriate, in a role closer to that of a 'specialist advisor', on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of individual impact statements.
- **Number of members of panels:** We are concerned about the increased workload for (non-user) panel members suggested in para. 96. The proposed Philosophy, Theology & RS panel increases the quantity of outputs to be assessed (1000 staff = 3000 outputs, compared to 577 philosophy staff = 2300 or so outputs) while increasing the number of panel members by much less (15 members of the Philosophy sub-panel in RAE 2008;

20 panel members across Philosophy, Theology & RS proposed to assess outputs for the combined PTR panel).

If there was one concern that the philosophical community had over the Philosophy sub-panel in RAE2008, it was that the sheer workload will have made it difficult for them to assess outputs accurately. The REF proposal would seem to make this even more of a problem, and it may even prove difficult to recruit the best-qualified panelists given the amount of work involved.

- The notion of ‘critical mass’ needs to be spelled out very carefully, and preferably excised all together. There was a perception arising from RAE 2008 that bigger was generally regarded by panels as automatically better. A relatively small philosophy unit (or a small number of philosophers within a larger, multi-discipline unit) can provide an excellent research environment for staff and PGRs by engaging in dialogue, events and other forms of collaboration with the broader philosophical community; and a coherent and supportive research culture can be established even with (and sometimes even because of) small numbers of staff and students.
- **‘Disjunctive’ narratives:** Quite a large number of philosophers in the UK work outside philosophy departments: in English, German, Politics and other departments. Some institutions have more than one unit engaged in philosophical research (e.g. a philosophy department and a medical ethics unit). Such units may not even lie within the same faculty. Whether intended by HEFCE or not, the perception of institutions in RAE 2008 was that a unified narrative in the RA5 would be much more favourably received than a more ‘disjunctive’ one (e.g. ‘here is how things work in the philosophy department; and here is how they work – differently – in the medical ethics unit’). The result, in some cases, was a level of claimed unity of activities, procedures and policies that did not really exist in practice. We believe that it is perfectly possible for ‘the’ philosophical research environment within a particular institution to be of a high quality even when it is dispersed across different departments and even faculties, in that the environment within each particular unit is of a high quality. This should be recognized in the REF guidelines; and certainly there should be guidance for how institutions should formulate their narratives in cases where the submitted UoA spans different parts of the institution so that institutions do not have to second-guess the panel.

The recognition of more ‘disjunctive’ research cultures might also encourage institutions that do not currently submit Philosophy as a UoA to do so (primarily new universities, where philosophers tend to be dispersed across a variety of departments). This would lead to a more accurate measure of the health of philosophical research within each institution, since philosophical research would be clearly marked and recognized as such, rather than being subsumed under other UoAs. (Get the word ‘latent group’ in here somewhere.)

- **Overall weighting of elements:** We should recommend 10% for impact and 75% for outputs. Reasons: (a) Impact is a new and untested element, and is being introduced at a stage that makes it too late for researchers to modify their activities significantly. (b) Much of the impact of philosophical research (as with other disciplines) cannot sensibly be measured by the REF in any case (e.g. because it cannot be traced back to the work of particular people or UoAs, or because the time-lag is too great). To give 25% to impact would be to give undue weight to short-term, directly traceable impact since other kinds of impact will necessarily go unmeasured. (c) The assessment of outputs is almost

universally acknowledged to be robust and fair; it is this element of previous RAEs that has underpinned their reputation within the academic community in the UK and internationally, both as a legitimate mechanism for distributing QR funding and as a measure of the research quality for other purposes (e.g. decisions of prospective PG students about where to study). Reducing the weighting given to this element from 80% to 60% threatens to undermine this reputation.

- **Merged PTR panel:** Agreed that the way to tackle this was not to object to the merged panel per se (something the consultation document effectively forbids) but to focus on the assessment process and the aggregation of results. Some points:

(i) Having merged REF results would result in a massive loss of hugely useful information for a variety of 'stakeholders', for example prospective postgraduate students and institutions themselves, which use RAE results as a major component in decision-making about investment and disinvestment.

(ii) It would also result in a flattening-out of the league tables, given very little correlation between the scores of Philosophy and T&R within the same institution in RAE 2008. (I think there would have been only one combined GPA of over 3 for PTR in RAE 2008 if the results had been aggregated.) Excellence in particular disciplines – both within particular institutions and nationally – would go unnoticed.

(iii) PT&R do not constitute a 'coherent research unit' in any UK institution we know of. There are areas of overlap (particularly in philosophy of religion) but this is a minority area of research within UK philosophy (and Theology). This is so even in institutions where the two disciplines are members of or wholly comprise a single School (e.g. PTR at Birmingham). Insofar as the REF aims to assess 'coherent research units', it cannot assess PT&R together. (HB to try and find out whether there were any cross-referrals between the two in RAE 2008.)

HB to begin to formulate the BPA response to the REF consultation, with additional input from the Committee at various stages.

ACTION: HB

11. AOB

There was one item of AOB, concerning the situation of staff on temporary contracts since the introduction of the new legislation. The Committee agreed that the terms and conditions of employment had deteriorated for many temporary staff, with many departments ensuring (often on the advice of their HR departments) that short-term contracts could not be made permanent by making them teaching-only or by making them less than 12 months. It was pointed out that there is enormous variation, nationally, in the interpretation of the legislation, with some philosophy departments effectively abolishing one-year temporary lectureships (e.g. to replace staff on research leave) and others routinely employing temporary staff on contracts of up to five years. HB to investigate, in the first instance, whether there is any guidance to HR departments (e.g. from a national professional association) available.

The Committee agreed that it did not want to stray onto UCU territory; on the other hand, it agreed that there may be some value in sharing information amongst philosophy HoDs to help them ensure that temporary staff contracts (specifically teaching positions that replace staff on

short-term research leave) do not involve long-term risk but also do not impose unreasonably poor working conditions on temporary staff.

ACTION: HB