

BRITISH PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
Executive Committee meeting

Thursday 23 April 2009, 12pm
Seminar Room, 19 Gordon Square, London WC1E 6BT

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present: Brad Hooker, Helen Beebee, Maria Alvarez, Jo Wolff, Tom Sorell, M.M. McCabe, Michael Brady, Adrian Moore, Jeremy Butterfield, Alessandra Tanesini, James Holden

1. Apologies: Pauline Phemister, Mark Addis, Gordon Finlayson

2. Minutes of the last meeting: Approved

3. Matters arising

Item 3, liability insurance: HB reported that she had now taken out employer's liability and trustee liability insurance.

Item 3, recent AHRC changes and cuts: (i) Details of the successor to the RLS – the Fellowships Scheme – had now been released by the AHRC; as predicted, this bore a close similarity to the BPA's proposal to the AHRC. BH had written to the AHRC to congratulate them on this. (ii) HB reported that the item on collaborative funding would be included in the 2009 newsletter, which was in progress.

Item 3, philosophy at Aberdeen: New appointments had been made at Aberdeen, and several more had recently been advertised.

Item 4, FISP: BH reported that he had been in email contact with the Chair of the APA concerning FISP; discussions on co-operation between the BPA and the APA were ongoing.

ACTION: BH

Item 5(c), PGCE in Philosophy: BH reported that he had written to the Minister for Children, Schools and Families, proposing the reintroduction of the Philosophy PGCE but had not yet received a reply. BH to give HB a copy of the letter for the website.

ACTION: BH

Item 8, ERIH: There had been a brief email discussion with some UK journal editors, but there was insufficient enthusiasm for a collective response along the lines of the HPS journal editors' response for the matter to be worth pursuing further.

Item 10, women in philosophy: A questionnaire had now been sent to all HoDs, in collaboration with Jenny Saul (Director of SWIP); the deadline for responses is mid-May.

Item 11, BPA teaching award: TS had raised this issue informally with the PRS with little response, but agreed to raise it again.

ACTION: TS

Item 12, AHRC BGP co-ordination: BH reported that some institutions (e.g. Stirling, Hull, Oxford Brookes, Herts) did not have BGP awards, and that – perhaps more worryingly since they now have no access to AHRC studentships except through research projects until at least 2013 – some philosophy departments within BGP-awarding institutions had not been awarded any studentships.

It was agreed that it would be valuable for the BPA to collect information about how many studentships individual philosophy departments had secured for each of the next 4 years of the BGP. It may also be useful to publish this information on the website, though it was noted that some departments might not want to do this since it might discourage applications to departments with few or no BGP awards even though internal funding was still available. It was agreed that Directors of Graduate Studies would be sent a short questionnaire asking for information about studentships, internal funding opportunities, and whether or not they would want to make this information publicly available, soon – for internal use by the Executive Committee only – with a follow-up questionnaire in September asking about their reaction to the whole process (e.g. difference in number or quality of applications received, whether there were problems with philosophy awards going to other departments, etc.). The issue would then be revisited at the November meeting.

ACTION: HB

Item 14, AQA Advisory Committee membership: HB reported that Mark A and TS were now the two BPA representatives on this committee.

Item 15, AOB: HB suggested that if anyone would like to progress the issue of 'portfolio' PhDs, they might write a short paper for discussion at a future BPA meeting. This was agreed. MM said she may be able to do this for the November meeting.

4. Director's report

(i) AHRC Advisory Board: HB reported that she was a member of the new AHRC Advisory Board, and had been to its induction meeting.

(ii) Departing members of the Committee: The Committee formally thanked PP, AT, JW and BH for their work on the committee. BH and JW were rewarded with small tokens of appreciation for their hard, and successful, work on the Committee since the BPA's inception in 2003.

5. Treasurer's report

JH made a brief verbal report on the BPA's finances, which are healthy. Membership numbers are currently slightly down on last year, but the recruitment drive is now underway and new members are coming in every day. Income has significantly exceeded expenditure so far this year but expenses for the IP/BPA reception and newsletter (see item 7) were still to come. The vast majority of individual members now pay by standing order, so levels of member retention should increase significantly.

6. Executive Committee membership and officers from 2009

(i) Committee membership

The members of the Committee who are at the end of their term and cannot be re-elected are JW, HB and BH.

The Committee formally recommended that HB be made a supernumerary member of the next Committee for her final year as Director; this decision to be ratified by the incoming Committee by email after the AGM.

AT also comes to the end of her term but is eligible and willing to stand for election again; it was agreed that she would be nominated for election by BH.

PP has stood down from the Committee due to other commitments.

TS is currently co-opted; it was agreed that he would also be nominated by BH.

Thus there would be 5 Committee places to be filled, with BH to nominate AT and TS for election.

(ii) The next President

The Committee agreed to formally recommend MM as the next President of the BPA. This decision would be ratified by the incoming Committee by email after the AGM.

(iii) Representation of temporary staff

The often difficult position of temporary lecturing and teaching-fellow staff was raised by Maria A and MM, and it was agreed that it would be good to know whether the BPA could assist them in any way. It was agreed that it would be difficult to get someone in this position as an elected member of the Committee; however co-option was a possibility.

It was agreed, after some discussion, that the best way forward would be to organize a workshop for temporary staff at the Joint Session, to see what their main concerns are and whether the BPA can help. AM agreed to run this session, along with Maria A if possible. HB to liaise with the Joint Session organisers to find a room and time (probably Saturday lunchtime).

ACTION: HB

7. Recruitment and membership

HB reported that the following actions had been taken (see item 6 of Nov. 08 minutes):

Website: A simple online application form for individual members was now up and running; the website also highlights the fact that members with online banking can set up a Standing Order online, and also offers learned societies the option of paying by SO.

BPA-sponsored receptions: HB had arranged with Barry Smith (Director of the Institute of Philosophy) to co-sponsor a wine reception after the paper by Jerry Fodor on 15 May. HB would make a short presentation and JH would man a recruitment desk; other Committee members were encouraged to attend. HB would try and get the 2009 newsletter and an updated 'why join the BPA' leaflet ready in time for this event.

HB also reported that Barry Smith had suggested offering BPA members free individual membership of the IP, though this would need to be endorsed by the IP Management Committee. The BPA Committee was enthusiastic about this proposal.

ACTION: HB

Recruitment materials: HB agreed to find a way of making the 'why join' leaflet and copies of the Newsletter available to Committee members for inclusion in delegate packs for conferences etc.

Targeting non-members: All Committee members had now been delegated to contact non-members in several departments each, asking them to join. Membership applications were coming in at a steady rate as a result (mostly via the online form and paying by SO).

Website links: Departments were now asked, when renewing their membership, to consider putting a link to the BPA on their home pages.

Postgraduates: HB had emailed the co-Chairs of the BPPA recently concerning PG recruitment to the BPA and had not yet had a response. JW suggested that BPPA members be offered free associate membership of the BPA; this was agreed. HB to pass on to the BPPA.

ACTION: HB

It was generally agreed that the profile of the BPA was now very good, with many responses to the call for new members being very positive about the BPA's importance. So the main task is to persuade people to make the effort to join, rather than informing them of the BPA's activities and purpose.

8. Philosophy in schools

TS reported that the first phase of the new Schools website was now almost complete: a Q&A website aimed at philosophy teachers in schools, where questions would be submitted to a panel of experts and answers posted on the site. The next step was for TS to ask the exam boards – AQA, OCR and Edexcel – to encourage teachers to use the site.

The issue of financing the site was discussed (money is needed primarily to employ someone on a casual part-time basis to manage the site and ensure that questions are answered promptly and appropriately). The exam boards could be asked to finance the site, but it was decided that this would put the BPA in a difficult position. It was decided that instead the BPA would approach the RIP or another wealthy learned society about sponsoring the site, since this would allow the BPA to maintain publicly its distance from the exam boards. HB and TS to discuss the financial and sponsorship arrangements.

JB raised the possibility of gaining more substantial funding from exam boards for more expensive activities, e.g. summer schools for teachers, which cannot be funded by the BPA. It was agreed that this matter would be reviewed after the relationship between the BPA and the exam boards had further developed.

ACTION: TS, HB

9. Liverpool

HB reported that the research review of the Department had been completed, and that she understood a formal decision would be made by the University in June. She expressed optimism that the Department would not be closed in the foreseeable future.

10. PRS Subject Centre

The Committee had read two reports from the PRS – one on their 'beyond boundaries' project and one on their current and proposed activities. On the former, it was agreed to consult Mark A on whether the PRS wanted support for this project, and if so what the nature of such support might be. On the latter, it was agreed that the PRS's current and proposed activities were worthwhile and sensible.

JB raised the question of whether the PRS might take responsibility for an online archive of philosophy research; HB pointed out that such an archive had recently been launched by Dave Chalmers and David Bourget at ANU, and that the project would be continuing at the IP with funding from JISC. It was agreed that this should be publicized in the 2009 Newsletter.

ACTION: HB

11. Philosophy in new universities

After a renewed effort, the majority of philosophy units in new universities had now returned their questionnaires. There was considerable enthusiasm for (a) a list of philosophers in new universities (most of whom are not located in philosophy departments and so suffer from visibility problems) to go on the BPA website, and (b) information on consortia to allow improved and reasonably cheap access to philosophy journals. HB and Mark A to take both matters forward.

ACTION: HB, Mark A

12. AHRC 'Future Directions' consultation

The discussion inevitably focused on two specific issues raised by the consultation that the AHRC were not specifically asking questions about, viz: (a) the four new 'core areas' that largely cut across disciplinary boundaries and in which large areas of philosophy do not fit; and (b) the impact/knowledge transfer agenda.

On (a), the Committee agreed that there was probably no intention whatsoever on the AHRC's part to exclude a lot of philosophy; most likely, they had simply not realized. The first category (Philosophy's most appropriate home) – 'History, Thought and Systems of Belief' – did explicitly mention the 'ethical [etc.] bases of human behaviour', but entirely focused on human beings and their thought, values and behaviour, thus leaving out e.g. metaphysics and philosophy of science, and also non-ethical normative areas, in particular epistemology. It was also noted that the consultation document did not specify how or whether the four new areas would affect AHRC procedures or policies, e.g. decisions on particular grant applications and higher-level decisions about the division of funding between the different areas.

It was agreed that HB and BH would draft a friendly letter to the AHRC, noting that they had unintentionally sidelined a lot of areas of philosophy and suggesting a rewording of the first 'core area'.

ACTION: HB, BH

On (b), it was pointed out that the AHRC seemed to be trying quite hard to adopt an inclusive conception of 'impact', e.g. by explicitly mentioning 'broadening the horizons of students who are exposed to [research] through research-led teaching'. It was also noted that the current fixation with 'impact' was not confined to the AHRC, RCUK, or even the UK Government but is a world-wide phenomenon.

Nonetheless, a general concern remained that the focus on short-term, local impact could be detrimental to philosophy, where it is more difficult to demonstrate short-term impact than in some A&H disciplines, and, thereby, to the genuine impact of philosophy in the longer term. It was noted, for example, that many disciplines have their roots in philosophy (psychology, indeed all the sciences ...); that the invention of the computer has its roots in analytic philosophy and in particular logic; and that welfare economics has its roots in utilitarianism.

It was decided that (unless suitable opportunities presented themselves) there was little point in addressing the impact/KT issue until the AHRC's 'Impact Task Force' had published its report (some time in 2009). At that point, the Committee would consider (i) engaging in a constructive dialogue with the AHRC on impact and KT, and (ii) issuing some specific advice to philosophers considering AHRC funding on how to tackle the 'impact statements' on grant applications, in the light of the AHRC's definition of impact. HB to monitor the situation.

ACTION: HB

The consultation document asked for specific suggestions for 'strategic themes'. There was no time to discuss this, but it was agreed that HB would email all BPA members explaining what the AHRC were looking for and asking for suggestions.

ACTION: HB

There was no time to discuss the BPA's response to the other questions in the consultation document; it was agreed that HB would write a draft response soon and circulate to the Committee for comments.

ACTION: HB

13. AOB: None.