

Institution: Birkbeck, University of London

Unit of Assessment: 32 Philosophy

a. Context

The Department of Philosophy at Birkbeck has a long tradition of seeking to spread engagement with philosophy beyond the academic world. Across the whole breadth of our research – into logic and mathematics; metaphysics and epistemology; philosophy of language; moral philosophy and aesthetics; and the history of philosophy – we speak about our research to, and collaborate with, a wide range of audiences and partners, including civil society and cultural organisations; professional bodies; industrial organisations; students of philosophy at all levels; and members of the general public. Our main types of impact have been: (1) to offer new ways of thinking to industrial producers, consumers, and professionals, to those involved in social and humanist causes, to creative practitioners, and to the general public; and (2) to influence the design of philosophy curricula internationally.

b. Approach to impact

As an institution, Birkbeck has at its core a commitment to the development of educated, thoughtful, engaged citizens, and to the transformative role of our research and teaching. The Department of Philosophy plays a vital and special part in delivering the College's mission, seeking to ensure that philosophical thinking and understandings of the history of philosophy are central to a flourishing public culture, in London, across Britain and internationally.

We have approached this goal of disseminating philosophical research and modes of thinking in a number of ways that both draw directly on our research and that mobilize our more general skills and attributes as philosophers. In many cases we have had clear intentions to engage with particular audiences, but in others we have responded to invitations from interested parties who have alighted upon our research and have sought our input and expertise. In this we have sought to capitalize on our central London location and to make good use of resources provided at School and College level to promote our research, particularly the work of the Digital, Online and Social Media Co-ordinator and the Impact and Knowledge Exchange Manager.

Working with civil society and cultural organisations: The Department has long been supportive of our members drawing on their philosophical scholarship and knowledge to contribute to civic and cultural life as *philosophers*. For example, the work of Anthony Grayling (who was a member of the Department until 2011) underpinned his public role as a philosopher in a number of humanist organisations, including as Vice-President of the British Humanist Association, the Patron of the United Kingdom Armed Forces Humanist Association, a patron of Dignity in Dying, and an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society. More directly related to his research, Grayling's book *What is Good* was the impetus for an invitation by playwright Mick Gordon for Grayling to collaborate in writing a play *On Religion* which had two theatre runs in London, one outside this REF period (2006), but its importance demonstrated by a further run in 2012. Under its American title, *Grace*, the play was also highly successful in New York, with Lynn Redgrave performing the lead role in 2008. In recognition of his achievements as a public philosopher, Michael Garnett has applied his research on political theory and the nature of freedom in two collaborations with cultural organisations. Working with Annette Mees, Director of Coney, an experimental theatre group funded by the Arts Council, Garnett offered philosophical advice during the production of a play titled 'Early Days (of a Better Nation)' which places the audience in a post-revolutionary situation and invites them to create a new society. The play has been developed in iterative stages in dialogue with audiences in London, Cardiff, Berlin, and, most recently, at the

Arnolfini, Bristol (February 2013). Garnett was also invited to speak on his account of freedom at the first 'Let's All be Free' film festival in London, a cross-platform initiative funded by international film production company, Unusuality Productions, that explores and celebrates what it means to be free (April 2013).

Engaging with industry, practitioners and policy-makers: In particular areas of our work, we have adopted a pro-active strategy of engagement with industry and practitioners, initially in order to disseminate our research, but increasingly, as we have learnt about the benefits of in-depth and extended collaborations, in order to co-produce new knowledge. Barry Smith's case study exemplifies this, and outlines an intensive process of knowledge transfer work with producers, scientists, critics and journalists associated with the food and drinks industry. John Sellars, who joined us in 2012, has developed his interest in the relationship between Stoicism and cognitive psychotherapy through direct engagement with practising psychotherapists in a workshop on 'Stoicism and its Modern Uses' (University of Exeter, 2012). In a more responsive mode, Jen Hornsby provided written evidence to the *Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press*, which was solicited on the basis of her philosophical research on free speech and speech acts. She was subsequently invited to be on a panel of three philosophers who gave oral evidence as expert witnesses to the Inquiry in July 2012.

Speaking with, writing for, and inspiring the general public: We regularly speak about our research to public audiences, large and small, at events hosted at Birkbeck, within the Department, via the School of Social Science, History and Philosophy Week, and organised by the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, which has a specific remit to contribute to the building of public intellectual cultures. We are keen collaborators with a number of philosophical organisations that have public programmes, including the Institute of Philosophy, the Aristotelian Society, and the Royal Institute of Philosophy, and these serve as further vehicles for the dissemination of our research. We receive frequent invitations to speak to non-academic audiences at cultural festivals (such as the Hay-on-Wye Philosophy Festival, 2011), at public events about topical issues (e.g. Hornsby in York on *Leveson and Public Integrity: what have we learned?*, 2013), and to large radio and online podcast audiences (e.g. Radio 4; Resonance FM).

We are also prolific contributors of philosophically-informed writing for non-academic audiences. Examples include Northcott's work on soccer and philosophy, Smith's on taste and the philosophy of wine (see case study), and Gemes' and May's work on Nietzsche, the 'death of God' and the crisis of values in the 21st century (see case study).

In an experimental vein, Sellars set up a 'Live like a Stoic Week', a collaboration with colleagues at the University of Exeter in November/December 2012 which was designed to make Stoic therapeutic practices accessible to a wide audience. Attracting national press coverage in the *Guardian* and *Independent*, it invited students at Exeter, school pupils and members of the public to participate and to contribute video material and blogs to the website.

Influencing the design and substance of education in philosophy: The Department's research has long had extraordinary influence in the education of philosophy undergraduates. We are responsible for the design of the structure and syllabus of the University of London's International Programme in Philosophy, and we additionally provide detailed Subject Guides based on our research interests which support students' independent learning. The International Programme is delivered at BA and Diploma level at universities and colleges across the world. In 2013, for instance, 25% of students registered for the BA in Philosophy lived in the UK, 10% in the US, 7% in Hong Kong, 3.9% in Canada, 3.9% in Australia, 3.5% in Greece, 3.5% in the Netherlands, 3% in Japan, 3% in South Africa, 2.6% in the Republic of Ireland and 2.6% in Italy, and the remaining 31% elsewhere.

Impact template (REF3a)

Our commitment to promoting philosophical research and understanding also leads us to work extensively with schools and further education colleges. Since 2011, the Department has organized three annual one-day conferences for schoolteachers. Each conference has been focused around a different philosophical theme, and a selection of our researchers has presented their research to these audiences. In addition, members of the Department are strongly encouraged to accept invitations to speak about philosophy at schools, and Ken Gemes, Miranda Fricker, Michael Garnett, and Ian Rumfitt have recently given well-received talks at secondary schools in the London area.

c. Strategy and plans

Our evolving impact strategy for Philosophy at Birkbeck centres around the continuation of the four main practices outlined above. We will continue to encourage members of the Department: to work with civil society and cultural organisations, to engage with industry, practitioners and policy-makers, to speak with, and write for, a wide range of publics, both about their own research and on issues of topical importance, and to work to shape philosophical education globally. We will continue to recognize the importance of both targeted, strategically formulated modes of engagement, and responsive activities that lead to “serendipitous impacts”. Specific plans include:

- to further develop our engagement with the University of London International Programme and other distance learning projects. This includes offering online content on its VLE (see Gemes case study). We are also currently developing proposals for research-led interactive MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) which have the potential to reach tens of thousands of people around the world.
- to organise a second, expanded, ‘Stoic Week’, in partnership with colleagues at Exeter. With AHRC ‘Impact and Engagement’ funding, the project will develop a collaborative network, a public conference at Birkbeck at the end of November 2013 and a significantly enhanced body of supporting textual and audio-visual resources for a wider audience, including its blog, an expanded version of the ‘Live like a Stoic’ handbook, and a collection of essays based on the public conference. The aim is for Stoic Week to develop a sustainable network and framework for wider public engagement.
- to continue to organise annual conferences promoting the latest research in philosophy to teachers in schools and further education colleges, especially those teaching A Level Philosophy, and to take up opportunities to speak directly about philosophy to school and further education students, in order to demonstrate the value and excitement of the discipline to the next generation.
- Hornsby and Lillehammer are developing plans for a series of research-led workshops on ethics in public life, targeted at public and private organizations outside academia. These plans include the provision of training to the Government Legal Service. Possible formats are currently being discussed in collaboration with a member of the legal section of HM Treasury, who is a former research student in the Department.

d. Relationship to case studies

Barry Smith’s case study exemplifies our commitment to taking philosophical research into industry, to engaging in intensive collaborations with practitioners, and to disseminating our research to a wide range of audiences, including journalists and members of the public. The work of Gemes and May illustrates our energetic engagement with public interest in a particular area of philosophy, and how we have translated academic research into modes of dialogue with a range of publics and through multiple media formats.