

1.8.92. Draft report from Ann Schofield.

# BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR IRISH STUDIES

Minutes of the Executive committee meeting of the BAIS which took place on Friday 17th July, 1992.

\* At the request of the meeting, Ann Schofield, Ruskin College, Oxford present to facilitate item 4 of the agenda, chaired the whole meeting.

Present:

[list with secretary]

Apologies:

[list with secretary]

Minutes of previous meeting:

Minutes agreed once the following corrections made and note taken of objection by GW\Aberdeen regarding 'tone' of minutes and factual errors.

Matters arising not on the agenda:

[with secretary]

Note: The following papers were tabled by Sean Hutton and, after discussion, accepted for this meeting.

- i. Biennial elections and AGM
- ii. What the Association Does
- iii. Contribution to discussion of future of BAIS

Agenda:

A.O.B. taken as the first agenda item as meeting would be a long one.

[with secretary]

# 1. Discussion: THE FUTURE STRUCTURE AND EXISTENCE OF THE BAIS:

The following aims and ground rules for this part of the meeting were agreed before the start of the discussion. The meeting would:

a. identify areas of agreement, possible compromise, irrevocable differences.

b. make a decision on the future structure and existence of the BAIS.

c. decide what needs to be worked on in both short and long term to develop the necessary strategies regarding future of the association .

d. set out programme to implement the decision.

e. divide up the proceedings as follows: In part one every member of the committee would speak for five minutes giving their views without interruption on items a. to c. Following a short break, the meeting would be opened up to discuss the points and issues raised. After a further short break the meeting would address d. on the basis of the decisions reached in the first part of the meeting.

f. To enable the secretary to contribute fully to the discussion, the chairperson would summarise the discussions in each part of the meeting and take full notes of the whole discussion which would serve as a confidential report of the meeting to the Executive.

From these notes a summary would be constructed by the secretary to serve as a public record of the meeting.

Given the pressures on the chair, all members to take responsibility for correcting the report with respect to their contribution (not that of others) to the meeting without serious recrimination for mistakes made by the chair! [I have a feeling this appeal is out of order but it was made and accepted by participants in the meeting]

g. conduct the meeting in a way that allowed each participant to speak without interruption, without offensive language or personal attacks that are unanswerable.



### Part A: Individual Representation

TD: Interest in Irish Studies (IS) growing in Britain. BAIS did not initiate or prompt it but it has an enormous part to play in linking, initiating, coordinating, facilitating this growth. At issue: firstly to get clear the type of organisation it should be - directing, full time organisation with looser links. Secondly, its relation with LUIS which is peculiar. Great loss that prestigious academic institution not in BAIS.

Conclusion: Hope (a) arrive a decision that puts to bed personal and academic differences between LUIS and BAIS; (b) act to ensure growth of association to coordinate all work in IS; (c) make tentative steps to put right cash flow problem and work with all involved in IS.

SR: At issue: Funding and constituency. Need to get clear whether BAIS a movement or an academic association. At present failing to attract members particularly in H.E. Stark decision to be made as falling membership indicates. Sense that idea of BAIS as academic association considered a failure. Not so. This does not preclude attempts to be a movement and lead the way but provides a useful a context.

Conclusion: take a limited perspective and raise profile of association by building on success through setting up cultural and other events to both fund raise and publicise association. Encourage diverse activities under BAIS umbrella.

KT: At issue: great sadness that association that started with such high hopes and that had achieved so much should become fragmented in so many ways. It has a great role to play in fostering interest in the Irish language.

Conclusion: It should carry on to give backing and support (not just financial) to projects such as ours. It should aim to become self-financing.

BP: At issue: BAIS made up of small number of enthusiasts typically from educational institutions of some kind. (Interesting parallels with Scottish Language Society). Each seeking personal enjoyment and links but also institutional links. Hence BAIS hybrid in two important senses that threaten to push it in different directions. Firstly, to finance projects so money an issue. Secondly to promote, initiate, support work in IS so has academic concerns. Main question: what's in it for the Irish community?

Conclusion: There is tremendous goodwill. There should be no areas of absolute control. It should be the kind of organisation



that can be a catalyst, channel resources, encourage others.

GW: At issue: To avoid worst outcome the tensions and pressures need to surface and be dealt with openly. These are not merely personal but fundamental differences of philosophy. Division between those who see association as a managing and directing group and those who see it as an initiating and networking association. The first requires strong bureaucratic procedures, the second relies on organic links and personalised networks for legitimacy and growth. The tensions have become insufferable and the personal attacks on Ruth as chairperson have become intolerable to her and others. The differences have shaped the association's relation with the outside world in particular the tragedy of the break with LUIS.

Conclusion: This a wrong and tedious way of running the association. It's success depends on agreed objectives, trust in each other and networking. Persuasion not confrontation is the way forward. Central question to those who advocate a managerial approach: 'in what sense is BAIS empowered to intervene in work in IS?

RDE: At issue: The joy of the association is that different nationalities were brought together through it and managed to hold together, flourish, and share ideas despite deep political differences. Tragedy that in April 1988 relations broke down between Jim and Pat and as a result LUIS was driven out of the association and fragmentation occurred between officers. Consequently, officers meetings have degenerated into occasions typified by negative carping and bitter personal attacks. These have been so dreadful that I was driven on one occasion to conceal a fund raising initiative which I believed would be madness not to follow up but which would have been obstructed by other officers because of antipathy to me.

Conclusion: The present officers should be replaced and every effort made to bring LUIS and Patrick back into BAIS.

LD: At issue: BAIS a voluntary set up with wide ranging remit. Consequently, it has provided support and friendship to those of us who would be isolated or marginalised. Its place in all education sectors is a testament to its point and success. But LUIS has dominated the association from the start to the detriment of other interests, needs and grievances. Most effort has been concentrated there: e.g., early on 50% of BAIS funds went to it, now the difficult relations with them dominate. Brilliant work undertaken in LUIS and other HE institutions but other areas of work have suffered: e.g., the need for social centres particularly among elderly and single people.



**Conclusion:** Need to look to the future, not the past. Three possible culture clashes have to be faced: Ireland/Britain, education/training, voluntary/statutory. We should not create more! There is a need for a balanced view on the needs, interests and grievances of those involved in IS. There is a great deal of goodwill out there. We need to get clear the financial, and geographical constraints on the growth of the association. We also need to see what happens to people who take up IS. Then we can work out the necessary structure for future development.

**JO:** At issue: BAIS has had six very successful years but the question (by GD) of its power to intervene in work undertaken doesn't need asking. There has been a problem of personal differences but the central issue is not one of relationship difficulties as suggested. It is that in terms of fundraising and general concern too much emphasis has been given to LUIS as a 'flagship' for IS and the fact that LUIS is now secure whereas BAIS is not.

**Conclusion:** We must concentrate on ensuring that BAIS continues to function with its central focus as a coordinating body. It should be more than an academic association. It should make strong connections with grass root organisations in the community and education. It needs to cut down on the scope of its activities. Using SH's tabled paper 'What the Association Does', it should keep going 6/7/8/9/10/12-13-14/15/16/cultural events still to be discussed. It should become self-funding with a good profile for money raising. It should decentralise where appropriate and devolve more power to the executive.

**JMc:** At issue: Misconceptions need to be removed regarding earlier suggestions that JO and I work too closely and that I lack autonomy of thought and action as an officer of the association. We work in different institutions and while we collaborate, we do so from a position of independence. They also have to be cleared up regarding my views on LUIS. I have no animus to LUIS, its work, or to Patrick.

The real tragedy is the unresolved relation between LUIS and BAIS. This is largely the result of the loose and flabby working structure of BAIS rather than personal differences. Officers meetings are problematic insofar as there is no regard by the Chair for procedure or commitment to decisions made in meetings.

**Conclusion:** BAIS has an important part to play in the development and support of IS. Its focus on H.E. does not preclude interests in other fields of work. I see the association having a linking role in the work of a small group of enthusiasts. For this to be successful both good personal relations and agreed procedures



are essential.

**GD: At issue:** There are personal differences within organisation which have resulted in cliques and a lack of confidence in each other. But the central issue is lack of money which has led the association into a contractual model and a different philosophy from that which generated it. We now face a time of stark realism in which we can no longer afford a salaried officer to oversee daily running of BAIS and its development.

**Conclusion:** We have to get behind the rhetoric, sort out the real personality differences and where possible bury the hatchet which has made LUIS a 'no go area'. We need to concentrate our minds on agreeing the best way of developing the association. We need to find a new way of administering BAIS and a new accounting system. In my view we should go for a broad brush approach rather than retreat into a narrow academic association. A good starting point would be to link fundraising with cultural events as others have been suggesting and to forge a new link with LUIS in setting up such events.

**MH. At issue:** the centrality of the relationship with LUIS indicated in the comments today pinpoints the weakness of BAIS as an organisation. Irish Studies is a subject area that goes beyond Liverpool and the HE sector. But both have been favoured in the remit of BAIS. This complete imbalance has been tolerated and has left BAIS open to charge of elitism and bias.

**Conclusion:** BAIS should be an academic association not a social movement although networking should be part of its brief. I support a broad brush approach in which the fortunes of the association are not equated just with the state of its relationship with LUIS. There needs to be careful costing of main stream concerns. A membership drive linked to fundraising through diverse cultural events should be the first concern of the new committee with its newly elected officers following the annual general meeting.

**GM: At issue:** Money decides the scope of the organisation. We have to be pragmatic in a time of diminishing financial support. If we are to survive, our philosophy must reflect the constraints under which we operate but we cannot develop while there are bad relations with a major institutional base of IS such as LUIS.

**Conclusion:** Economic considerations should given direction to the future of BAIS, not personal difficulties. We need to establish achievable tasks according to our resources in order for our philosophy of networking and seedcorn to be viable. We need fresh initiatives and enthusiasm to build on the huge

work already undertaken. Immediate aim should be to increase membership and to rebuild relations with Liverpool using committee members who have not become caught up in the difficulties described today.

SH: At issue: As appointed officer, interrelated personal and structural. I resent two personal caricatures applied to me here today: (i) my attitude to LUIS ; (ii) I represent a sclerotic bureaucracy damaging to BAIS. I am not personally antagonistic to LUIS but there are real differences that have arisen that need to be sorted out both personally and procedurally in the interests of both LUIS and BAIS.

I do believe that a system of running the association beyond random and ad hoc personal relations both inside BAIS and externally is essential to its survival and future development.

There is a breakdown of trust between the Chair and other officers as the Chair has ignored or forgotten committee decisions and pursued her own view of the best way forward. This has led to serious day to day running difficulties in the office and undermined agreed policy decisions.

The marginalisation of both elected and appointed officers in the conduct of business has led to frustration and deep resentment among them and the threat of chaos in the affairs of the association.

For there to be an association that is seen to be fair and equitable in its dealings and which is to have a chance of growing, there has to be a structure to which all those on the executive abide. This is particularly important as there will no longer be an officer appointed to undertake the work of the association. Where there is disagreement regarding policy or the constitution, these have to be publicly and properly addressed.

The need for an agreed structure was put to us last year by the special facilitator asked to advise on BAIS.

Conclusion: The association has to act fast as it is faced with the immediate problem of what to do once I have left. There should be a meeting of officers between now and November to establish a programme of responsibility and general tasks. But there also needs to be a hard look at the philosophy of the association under the new constraints.

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**Response to the discussion so far by Chairperson:**

I was struck by the commitment of everyone present to the association. Moreover, it was noticeable that inspite of real differences no-one suggested (a) the association should fold up or that (b) anyone had acted in bad faith. That seems to me very significant and something tangeable to hold on to now and in the future.

I was, however, puzzled on two counts:

1. the difficult relation between BAIS and LUIS seemed to be built on what I think of as a category mistake. As I understand it from the discussion LUIS has institutional status and BAIS is an independent association of those involved in IS. In the discussion today, they appear to have the same the same status in people's minds.

I would suggest this should be unpacked both in attempts to rebuild the relationship with LUIS but also in more general terms with other institutions now and in the future. (This could of course be the result of shorthand speech among the committee members deeply acquainted with the issues in a way that I am not.)

2. I was struck by the isolation of the officers from the rest of the executive. They seem a closed group and have clearly become emeshed in problems in a very personal way. They all appear to have suffered great hurt on behalf of the association and to have feel accountable for the association's survival in harsh times and associated difficulties to a surprising extent.

It would, I think, benefit the future work of the committee and help to rebuild relations within it if the whole committee looked at this as an issue of collective responsibility.

Five issues consistently emphasised in the previous discussion that need to be taken up in the next part of the meeting:

1. the direction of the organisation;
2. the future relationship between (a) members of the executive (b) BAIS and LUIS;
3. the purpose of the asssoiation (a) leader (b) networking (c) academic: grass roots/specialist/practical;
4. the significance to be given to identified clashes: personal, ideological, cultural, institutional, national;
5. Action: radical - resignations/compromise - redefine consitution and renegotiate relationships.



Part B: Open debate

(BP) Going back to academic association is not an option. IS not strong enough to support it. Issue is means of greatest efficiency without imposing stricter rules. Informal relations in which people are given their heads has led to good work. To date there has been an imbalance in the attention paid to Liverpool and getting unit off the ground.

(SH) Many unresolved issues particularly around fundraising Cannot rely on 'happy accidents' and ad hoc initiatives. Efforts require constant evaluation and monitoring.

(RDE) There is a culture clash among officers on purpose of association which have led to intolerable pressures on individuals. 'Happy accidents' have led to very positive outcomes.

(SH) These are not either/or situations. There are many initiatives all of different standing but need coherent approach among officers.

(TD) In danger of remaining discursive. Suggest following proposals:

(i) celebrate what group has achieved. NIPLES - fantastic strength.

(ii) rework the relationship with LUIS to benefit IS.

(iii) address tension among officers re interpretation of purpose and methods of working.

(iv) adopt philosophy of umbrella for work in IS. Move to use strengths of individual officers not undermined by tension. Request officers stay in post.

(JMc) An agreement on philosophy is essential particularly among officers. There also has to be openness among officers. At present move from progressive positive policy to no policy. Impossible to act responsibly if ignorant of the plans and actions of other key players.

(GW) Demand for more structures by certain officers clearly working against successful initiatives. Minutes are disingenuous where they suggest no problems with Liverpool.

(SR) Questionnaires-high returns. But clear we are not retaining membership numbers. Whatever the view of the executive, we have not carried interested people. No rationale for keeping present constitution if members not increasing.

(N-) BAIS executive is a collective body here to service a national association. The issue of Liverpool has become a case of the tail wagging the dog rather than reciprocity. This meeting must signal the end of a chapter on the old relationship and seek a new one to be instituted by the new executive elected at the forthcoming AGM.

(JO) The minute is correct. It is essential to abide by decisions agreed at meetings. There is real disagreement on how best to defend interests of BAIS among officers but our personal and professional interests have never obscured BAIS interests as suggested earlier.

(Treasurer) Difficult relations between officers has meant that the sub-committee has blocked initiatives rather than enabled them. Essential work has not taken place and animosity towards the chair has made meetings unpleasant.

(GB) The sub-committee has lost sight of its target, become too self-important and an atmosphere of implied criticism prevails.

(SR) There are some positive developments on which we can build. EG Liverpool is successful and they have made a new appointment in Literature who we could liaise with.

(RDE) Yes, there has been bad blood but there is much new blood and the possibility of reproachment.

(SH) We need to begin afresh. We have made mistakes but it would be absurd to break off relationships with Liverpool but they need to be reworked to the equal advantage of both BAIS and LUIS.

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#### Response to debate so far by Chairperson:

1. There is agreement that the association should survive but the relationship between BAIS and LUIS pervades all discussion and prevents movement on this.

2. I sense a real regret among officers at the breakdown of trust between them. But while personal strengths are recognised, the personal hurt and antagonism between them is entrenched in such a way that means it cannot be resolved within this meeting.

3. Members of the executive have become sucked into the officer's difficulties so that 'loyalty' to individuals or a position has become the key concern. The concrete aims, objectives and means of the survival of the association in a way that will ensure the development of IS in Britain are being lost.



Part C: Programme for action

1. Keep history in mind but do not be bound by it. Work to break down apparent polarisation. Put together a five year plan taking in key interests and key events.
2. (i) Officers should stay in post at least until the AGM  
(ii) No compromise motion. Officers must say if they are unable to work together constructively and civilly following this meeting.
3. S. Regan and B. Bell to visit LUIS in September to begin negotiations for a new working relationship and report back to executive on options for practical cooperation and necessary changes to constitution
4. Other areas of collaboration to be surveyed. Sixth Form connections to be taken up where interest known. Put together a Sixth form Conference. Do not get hooked on academic circle. Great potential for interest among community groups - e.g. Irish street lives
5. Consider regional connections and possibilities for collaboration. David Cairns, CNA, a potential source of support for moving forward relationship between BAIS and Irish Centres.
6. Survey membership to see why it is dropping off and then decide what needs to be done to enhance it.
7. Immediate priority in SH paper 2/3/5
8. Implement programme of support of office immediately given that Sean is leaving.

(signed)

  
Ann Schofield

(date)

1.8.92.