

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF BAIS AT
BIRKBECK COLLEGE, MALET STREET, LONDON, ON 1 JUNE 1991,
COMMENCING AT 12.45 P.M.

PRESENT: Ruth Dudley Edwards (chair), Bob Bell, George Boyce,
David Cairns, Emrys Evans, Mary Hickman, Jim McAuley, Séamus Mac
Mathúna Jim O'Hara, Siobhán Uí Néill, Bob
Purdie, Shaun Richards, Joe Sheeran, Kate Thompson.

APOLOGIES: Paul Bew, Nesson Danaher, Tony Downey, Eamonn Hughes,
Siobhán Uí Néill, Jonathan Moore, George Watson.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: Accepted as a true account and
signed.

MATTERS ARISING: There were no matters arising.

VERBAL REPORT FROM THE OFFICERS CONCERNING THE CONTINUED
EXISTENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION: The Vice-Chair delivered this
report, outlining the financial situation of the Association. He
said that in order to gain more time in which to attract new
money it was necessary to cut back on the expenses of the
Association. The two chief expenses of the Association were the
salary of the Executive Director and the cost of the office. It
was proposed to cut each of these by half. This would mean that
the money the Association now had would ensure the life of BAIS
for a longer period. The nature of the organisation needed to be
addressed at this time also. He pointed out that some
subcommittees were functioning better than others, but that
generally the subcommittee system could not be said to be working
that well. It was essential that a range of activities took
place under the aegis of BAIS: centrally organised activities and
activities originating with subcommittees. There was also the
possibility of regional groupings to involve local members. He
pointed out that the situation concerning publications was
unsatisfactory: neither Irish Studies in Britain or the
Newsletter had appeared for some time. All these matters, as well
as the question of fundraising, now needed to be addressed.

The Chair pointed out that there were various fundraising
prospects in sight but that it was not the optimum time for
fundraising.

Members felt that, from the point of view of BAIS, the important
thing was not what was happening generally but what the
Association itself was doing. Some members expressed the
belief that the Association should have a better focus and that
its work should be better known. It was also stated that, while
the Association did not aim to be exclusive in educational terms,
the bulk of the membership was concentrated in higher education.

Joe Sheeran, as a member in secondary education, stated that he
felt somewhat on the fringes of the Association. Speaking of his
own sector, he felt that there was a market out there, the
problem being how it might be served. Others pointed to the

Association's failure to draw any substantial membership from this sector and the failure of a projected Liverpool Institute conference to get off the ground for lack of support.

A number of members felt strongly that the national focus must be retained in order to ensure that the highest standards were maintained in Irish Studies. The idea of regional activity rather than a regional structure appeared more acceptable.

Séamus Mac Mathúna felt that there was a general fuzziness regarding the profile of the Association: members skirted round the philosophy.

Bob Purdie felt that the Association's prime activities should be those of (a) evangelisation (b) facilitating: putting people in contact with people, pointing people towards resources (c) improving communication between the Association and the public/the grassroots. BAIS should be a resource centre providing bibliographies, information re events, re Irish Studies courses, etc. The Association should be responding to relevant consultation papers on education. He felt that a priority was to have a publication which would act as a channel of communication. This would need external financing.

George Boyce felt that the question of publications was vital. BAIS should be a holding company: enthusing, collecting and disseminating information, with the emphasis on quality.

* The Exec Dir said that he would circulate a list of the sort of information which was most frequently required by enquirers who rang in.

It was felt by some that a series of regional conferences to meet the differing needs of the BAIS constituency would assist with recruitment of membership. Others were doubtful. However, the opinion was strongly expressed that facilitating the needs of particular constituencies would lead to greater recruitment of members.

A number of people felt that the Association could benefit from the resources of higher education institutions, in re publication, in development of data bases, for example. Higher education could help resource the needs of adult education.

There was some discussion re the setting up of a data bank. Questions were raised about what sort of information should be kept on this, where would it be located, etc. * David Cairns to submit paper on this.

The Officers' decision to try to bring Irish Studies in Britain under the aegis of the Association, and of amalgamating that and the BAIS Newsletter, was referred to.

* Bob Purdie was then asked to head a subcommittee to draw up a prospectus for such a new magazine in consultation with any of

the following: the Hon Sec, Convenor Higher Education Subcommittee, the Newsletter Editor, the Exec Dir, the Conference Secretary, Bob Bell, George Watson, Tony Downey.

There followed a discussion of the situation with regard to primary and secondary education. Joe Sheeran pointed to the pressures on Upper Schools at the moment. He felt that chief opportunities might be in Middle and Primary schools. They had no Primary teachers as contacts at the moment. The need in Primary schools was for support materials. He commented on the slow take-off of the A, A/S levels. He felt that teachers linking to Liverpool in connection with the Joint Education Programme were being given a higher education orientated input: which was not what they needed. Bob Bell felt that Liverpool did not have the resources to organise outside the north of England. Also, the JMB was not taken widely outside the north of England: need to approach other examination boards. It was suggested that, as part of an agreement on minority areas of the curriculum, JMB had been given a monopoly of this area: this needed to be clarified before other boards were approached.

Overlaps with Adult and Continuing education and Irish language were noted. Room for co-operation between Adult and Continuing and Primary/Secondary areas.

Bob and Joe committed themselves to continue to build up contacts towards getting activity off the ground in this area. The willingness of Tony Downey to work with them was noted. Bob stressed the need for a meeting with Liverpool. * The Executive Director to provide them with copies of Joint Education Programme Documentation to facilitate discussions with Liverpool and development of a strategy.

The efforts to get a Cultural Subcommittee underway, and the difficulties which had been encountered were then touched upon. Bob Purdie mentioned a colleague at Ruskin College, Stephen Reagan, who might be willing to help in this area. * Bob to approach Stephen Reagan on this matter.

In Nessan Danaher's absence his written report was noted. The Executive looked forward to receiving the report of the projected meeting of the subcommittee.

Higher education was then considered. George Boyce referred to three projects. David Cairns and he hoped to have a brochure on Irish Studies in Higher Education ready for September. He was approaching publishers on the question of the pamphlet series which had been raised at the previous meeting. There was some discussion of the pamphlet series. Mary Hickman was concerned that the series appeared to be confined to history and English literature. The Hon Sec stressed the importance of a Politics/Sociology element. George said that the intention was to concentrate on what would sell initially. There would be room for further developments. Shaun Richards suggested that the question of the general title was important. It should be broad

enough to include a wide range of disciplines. Mary continued to register her concern. She felt that such a series should be attempting to influence the development of Irish Studies, not merely reinforcing what was already there.

George also mentioned a microfilm service which had approached the Association. They would publish: the BAIS title would appear on the the publications. They already had an arrangements with ACIS. This service would cover the whole range of Irish Studies. One of the first projects in which they were interested was a list of theses. * The Executive agreed to George following up this proposal.

* Agreed that George should be general editor of the pamphlet series and the microfilm series.

There was some discussion of the membership of the Higher Education Subcommittee. It was pointed out that other functioning subcommittees had between 3 and 9 members. It was pointed out that membership of a subcommittee was by invitation of the convenor, who was nominated by the Executive. * It was agreed to broaden the membership of the Higher Education Subcommittee. * Those interested in becoming members should signify their interest to George.

It was suggested that there should be one Subcommittee for Higher Education and Adult and Continuing Education. Opinions were stated for and against this proposition, but no decision was taken on the matter.

The Treasurer now referred to the financial situation and the need to make substantial savings. He supported the Vice-Chair's proposals re economies. He suggested that savings would have to be made elsewhere also, but that the salary of the Exec Dir and the cost of the office were the main items.

The Hon Sec asked that his thanks to the Exec Dir for the responsible attitude which he had taken during the preliminary negotiations re this situation be minuted. The Chair said that the objective was to gain more time for fundraising. The objective was to get the Exec Dir back on full time.

It was pointed out that with an Exec Dir on half-time, not all the work which he was currently doing could continue to be done. Various offers of help were made which would reduce office costs. * Executive Director said that he would circulate a form on which members could indicate the nature of that assistance. * Executive agreed to empower Officers to conclude an agreement with the Exec Dir.

AOB

David Cairns referred to the small number of replies to the questionnaire in connection with the next edition of the Survey of Irish Studies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. While

there were some suggestions of questionnaire fatigue, it was also clear that some members had not returned their questionnaires since their circumstances had not changed since the last survey and they had assumed they would be included on that basis.

* David Cairns to seek to get notice for the survey in THES, TES and Guardian.

* Exec Dir to remind members to return questionnaires in next circular.

Reference was made to the grant in support of the BAIS Conference from the Cultural Relations Committee. * It was decided that a letter should be sent to Paul Murray (copy to the Ambassador) thanking him for his active support of the BAIS application, and to Gerry Collins thanking him for the grant. Both to express the thanks of the Executive.

The meeting concluded at 5.20 p.m.

* The next meeting of the Executive to take place on Saturday, 21 September 1991.

* Papers to Exec Dir for circulation by 10 September.